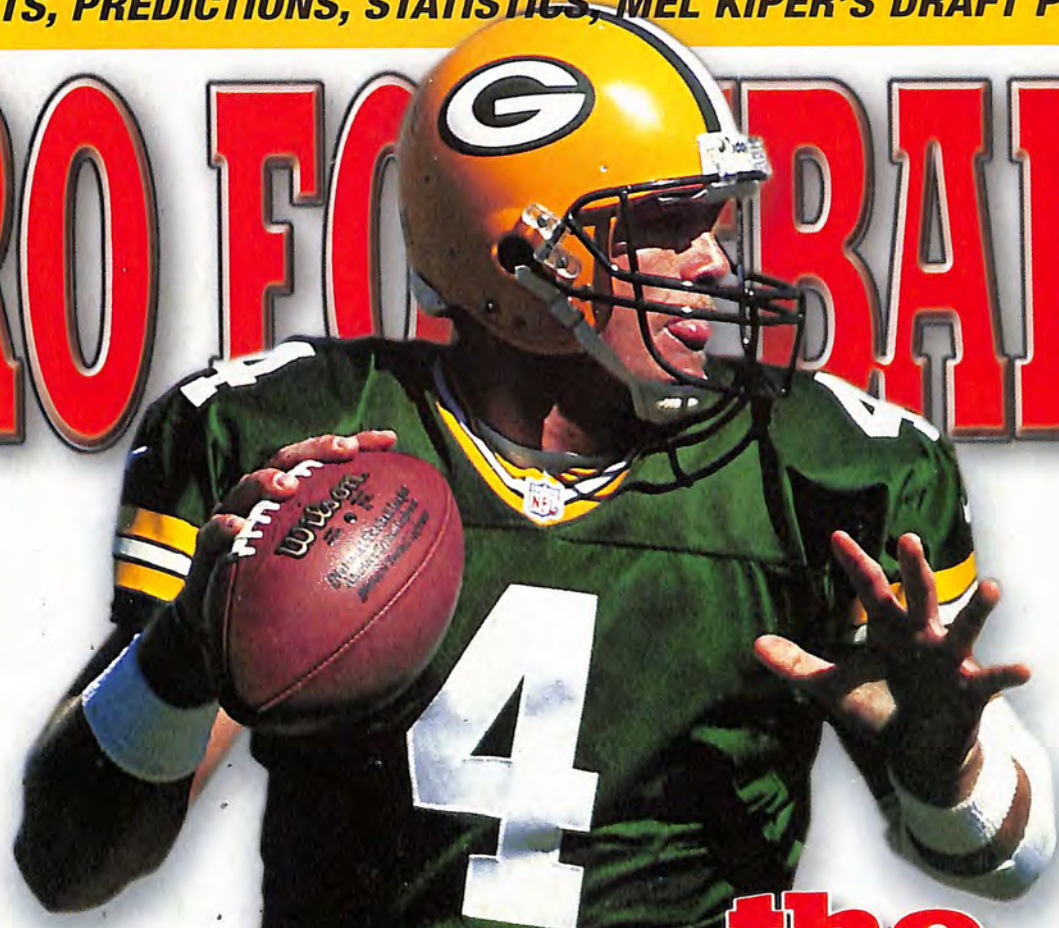


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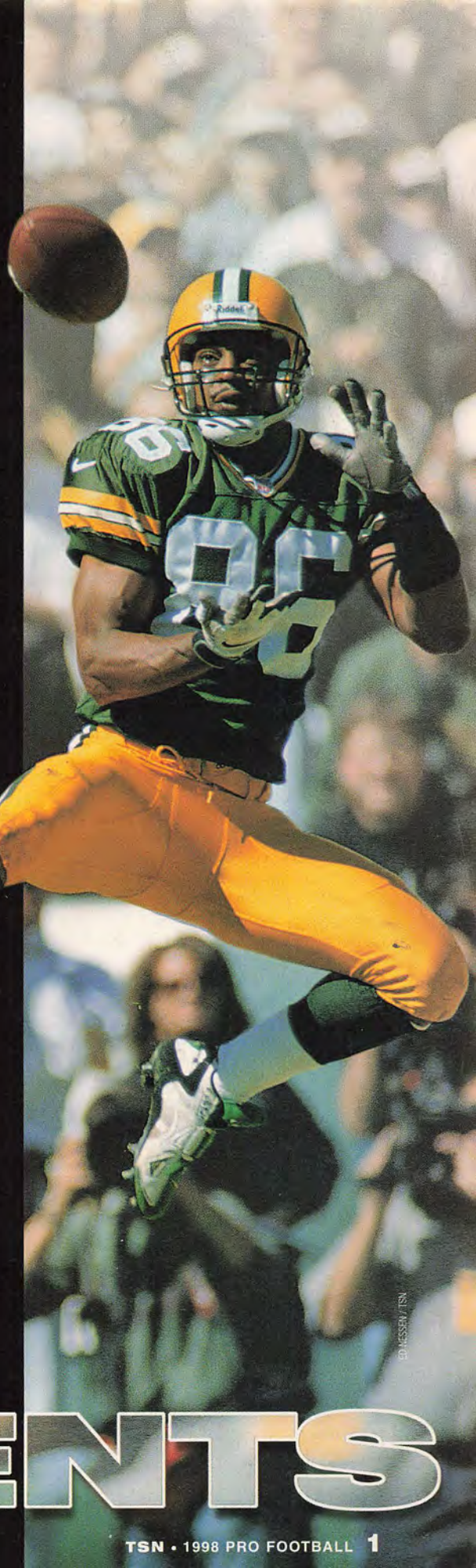
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From the Editor

Jason Sehorn: WYSIWYG

Many computer programs have a feature that allows you to view a document on the screen just like it will appear on the printed page. It's called "WYSIWYG," which stands for "what you see is what you get."

Jason Sehorn, the star cornerback for the New York Giants, is the antithesis of WYSIWYG. Take one look at Sehorn and what you see is this: surfer dude ... silver spoon ... safety. But that's not what you get. Not even close. And that's why Bill Minutaglio found Sehorn so fascinating when he offered to write a feature on him for *The Sporting News 1998 Pro Football*.

"First impressions of Sehorn are deceiving," says Minutaglio, a TSN contributing writer who lives in Austin, Texas. "He seems like a guy who grew up with the world at his feet—well-liked, handsome, outgoing. But the truth is that his childhood was very difficult—poverty, constantly moving from house to house, only one parent. Of course, that all fits in pretty neatly with the fact that appearances can also be deceiving on the field: He is a white cornerback."

That is what makes this a compelling football story. Over the years, Sehorn has overcome numerous hardships and stereotypes—not the least of which is a gridiron form of reverse discrimination—to become one of the NFL's best cornerbacks. And he has done it without a hint of swagger. "He seems to know where he came from and how he got to his successful position in life," Minutaglio says.

The Sehorn story is among several we commissioned from award-winning writers. Of particular note are a profile of Warren Sapp by *Tampa Tribune* columnist Martin Fennelly and a poetic tribute to Barry Sanders by TSN columnist Dave Kindred, the 1997 national Sportswriter of the Year.

But you want more than feature stories. You want information and analysis, and we have plenty of both, starting with league and conference scouting reports by TSN senior writer Dan Pompei. He covers the NFL each week in *THE SPORTING NEWS*, but like most NFL fans, you'll find that reading Pompei once a week isn't enough. Fortunately, you can get more Pompei and lots more on the NFL at our online sites (www.sportingnews.com and AOL keyword: TSN). Both sites offer up-to-the-minute news, expert analysis, team-by-team reports—all the stuff you crave on a daily basis.

That brings me to the most improved part of this magazine: the team previews. We've added a page to each preview this year, which means our correspondents can analyze their teams in even greater depth. The previews top off a yearbook package that we believe is second to none. Let me know if you think otherwise, because it's our goal to bring you the best. You can write me at 10176 Corporate Square Dr., Suite 200, St. Louis, MO 63132, fax me at 314-997-0765 or e-mail me at nahrstedt@sportingnews.com.

I just checked out this letter on WYSIWYG view, and I'm out of space. Enjoy the '98 season!

Mike Nahrstedt



Jason Sehorn

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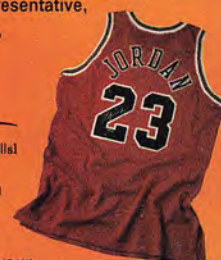
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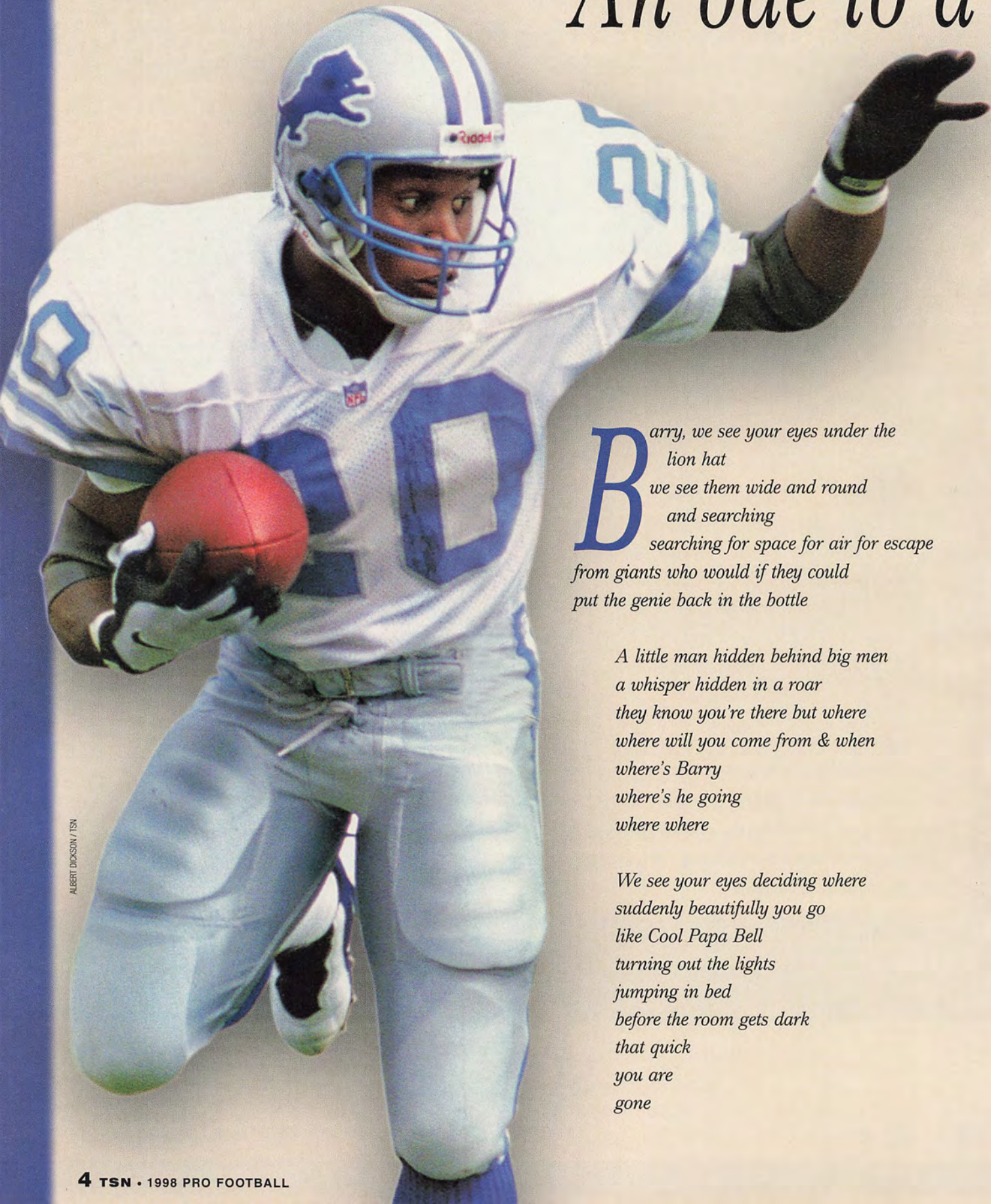


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An ode to a



*Barry, we see your eyes under the
lion hat
we see them wide and round
and searching
searching for space for air for escape
from giants who would if they could
put the genie back in the bottle*

*A little man hidden behind big men
a whisper hidden in a roar
they know you're there but where
where will you come from & when
where's Barry
where's he going
where where*

*We see your eyes deciding where
suddenly beautifully you go
like Cool Papa Bell
turning out the lights
jumping in bed
before the room gets dark
that quick
you are
gone*

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

whisper hidden in a roar



**Dave
Kindred**

*They ask you to run left against the bears
the simplest oldest play off tackle
into the maelstrom
searching for the light
getting low and wide and waiting
until there is no more waiting looking
you feel a space where no one sees a space
because the space is where only you feel it
above the maelstrom over the fallen giants
you're suddenly at speed your legs up
not so much a leap as a flight
coming to earth on your right foot then left
the impossible done and it's only the start*

*For in the moment of landing
faster than a breath
you do a 360 a circle a spin
you do what Jordan Gretzky Bird did
you see possibilities others never see
you make the simplest oldest play
a marvel a mystery a miracle
an act of genius
moving to what you see
X's & O's obsolete
because you do
schematics
curlicues
doodles*

*We want to know how you do that thing you do
how you become a leaf riding on the wind
Ali's butterfly Ella Fitzgerald's jazz
uncatchable because you're unknowable
this way falling that way rising
reality made over into illusion
always there to be touched
but always out of reach
of men who say you are
"like a bar of soap in the tub"
"like trying to catch the wind"
"like a bouncing pinball"
"a rabbit in a field"*

*"fireworks on the Fourth of July"
You run right against the buffaloes
nowhere to go darkness a wall no escape
you do what you do which is go low
eyes wide always looking searching
97 has you in his mighty grasp
goes down to take you down
spiraling down
your hat six inches off the ground
your feet flying
a pinwheel
spinning on your left hand
only that hand touching earth
97 believes he has caught the wind
until he sees what he fears
"the scariest player I've ever played
because he can embarrass you"
now he's down you're up
and you're
gone*

*Defenders are told "tackle his outside leg"
"maintain your backside lanes"
"cut off his escape angles"
and when all that fails
"just stay where you are
because he'll be back"
and they'll stop breathing
because here you come again
on weightlifter's legs
every step so powerful
"he pulls the turf up off the concrete"*

*Yet vaporous ethereal ephemeral
and when they reach to touch you
you disappear dematerialize divide
we see their hands
empty embarrassed
reaching for your back*

*They say
"he stops on a dime" "cuts on a dime"
"cuts on a dime & gives you change"
"stops faster than anybody
starts faster than anybody"
"man oh man you see it you're
in disbelief until you see it on film
and it's 10 times better than you believe"
"how can somebody be that
much better than everybody else"*

*"he's got ball bearings instead of joints"
And a linebacker thought to ask
why you so often went backward
but decided "telling Barry
how to run would be like
calling the Vatican and
telling the pope
how to pray"*

*"I never could run straight through people"
you say of how you do it
"so I had to find another way"
water around a boulder
sunlight through shutters
a little man in a big man's game
a little big man making big men little*

*To play with the big boys at home
the little boy said "Daddy I want
to run from one end to the other"
and you created a way
stutter steps sidesteps & shuffles
dancer's spins & cat's jumps
shoulder shakes & lookaway eyes
a song sung to a tune only you hear
with lyrics only you know*

*Barry's way
For of the ghost Grange the comet Sayers
O.J. on spindly legs Jim Brown superman
and even Sweetness himself
only you so often took the ball
and left us breathless
where is he going
left us laughing
did you see Barry
how did he do
that
how did he get
gone*

TSN

*Dave Kindred is a contributing writer for
THE SPORTING NEWS.*

DAVE KINDRED

Some franchises just never seem to get it right. Bad ownership begets bad front-office hirings that beget bad coaching selections that beget mediocre teams.

No one has had it wrong more often in the NFL than Indianapolis, which had a bungler for an owner and made a series of coaching and personnel misadventures that have kept the club mostly mired in mediocrity since it snuck out of Baltimore 15 years ago.

But now the father is dead and his son is the owner and what has been a joke for so long may not be the brunt of guffaws anymore. Certainly, no one is laughing in the Colts' front office. You don't yuck it up when Bill Polian is around, not unless you want to feel the heat of his remarkable temper. These are serious times in Indianapolis, where one of the league's most gifted franchise saviors is facing the biggest challenge of his NFL career.

If Polian can't resurrect the Colts and mold them into consistent winners, then it's quite possible the franchise is destined to wallow in the shadows of the NFL's best clubs. Still, if nothing else, Polian's presence in Indianapolis should give fans of the franchise hope that this woebegone team finally might do things right for the long term. Under Polian, the

and three awards as NFL Executive of the Year. He added a fourth trophy—and came within a victory of a fifth Super Bowl—during a three-season stay in Carolina, where he turned an expansion franchise into an immediate contender. But the low-key Richardson family, which owns the Panthers, wanted more input into personnel and didn't mind when the high-key Polian accepted Jim Irsay's invitation to run the Colts. Now, it's up to Indianapolis to adjust to Polian. After 23 years in this business, he is not about to change.

Polian no longer is just a general manager. He's a team president, and with that elevated title come new responsibilities. He's involved in all sorts of non-football tasks, from tickets to talks, but don't be fooled. He'll keep his job only if the personnel side of his duties flourishes. He

may not negotiate every contract now, but he still does the key ones. He may not scout as many college prospects as before, but he'll still visit the best ones. And unlike many other teams, he has no assistant watching over the salary



Paul Attner

Bill Polian's impressive credentials say they can—and he's the man to do it

Can the Colts be saved?

Colts will have a well-conceived rebuilding plan. Under Polian, they will have quality decision-making. Under Polian, they will have an efficient personnel department that works as hard as any in the league.

Even before Polian, the Colts already were better. They improved as soon as Jim Irsay assumed control of the franchise after his father died in January 1997. Robert Irsay left no shining moments as his football legacy, only a gutless choice to take the Colts out of Baltimore in the middle of the night in 1984. He was a meddler of the worst kind, a know-nothing who ran the franchise as a personal play toy until becoming gravely ill a few months before his death. He once even fired his son, taking away his control of personnel and replacing him with Bill Tobin.

For a while, the move seemed inspired. In 1995, the Colts belied their 9-7 record by coming within a pass completion of winning the AFC championship. But Tobin, a well-respected talent judge, proved ineffective when selecting coaches. Instead of retaining Ted Marchibroda after that season, he chose to elevate offensive coordinator Lindy Infante into Marchibroda's spot. That decision crash-landed the franchise, resulting in 20 defeats in the Colts' past 27 games.

Jim Irsay fired Tobin, then he fired Infante and hired Polian. He negotiated a new and improved lease on the RCA Dome, ending speculation the Colts were eyeing a new home in Cleveland. He is spending \$5 million to renovate an outdated practice facility. He has added 25-plus people to the marketing department. And, most important, he chose a hands-off approach toward micromanaging player personnel. Unlike his father, the son says he will get out of the way and let his football people run the football operation.

Polian will make sure Irsay lives up to his word. Polian will abide no interference. His singlemindedness, combined with a furious temper, ended a run in Buffalo that resulted in four Super Bowl appearances



The Colts were 'very lucky' to be able to draft Manning (left), the man Polian has decided to build the franchise around.

cap. That's his private domain because he's convinced only wise cap management allows a small-revenue franchise such as the Colts to succeed.

He already might have decided his Colts legacy. The two most important decisions a football manager makes are the choice of coach and quarterback. Everything else is complementary. He replaced Infante with Jim Mora, who forged a mostly successful run in New Orleans before disintegrating in his final season and quitting after eight games. Polian thought the Indianapolis players lacked passion, direction and discipline. Mora will give them all three, but he must show more imagination on offense to

improve on his Saints record (93-74 in 10½ seasons, 0-4 in the playoffs). At quarterback, Polian had the choice of two franchise-potential quarterbacks. He went with Peyton Manning over Ryan Leaf, opting for maturity over creativeness.

"If a good coach is available and you have the opportunity to get a franchise quarterback, you are very lucky," Polian says. "Then you have to take advantage of the luck by making the right choices. It really wasn't that difficult of a decision in either area."

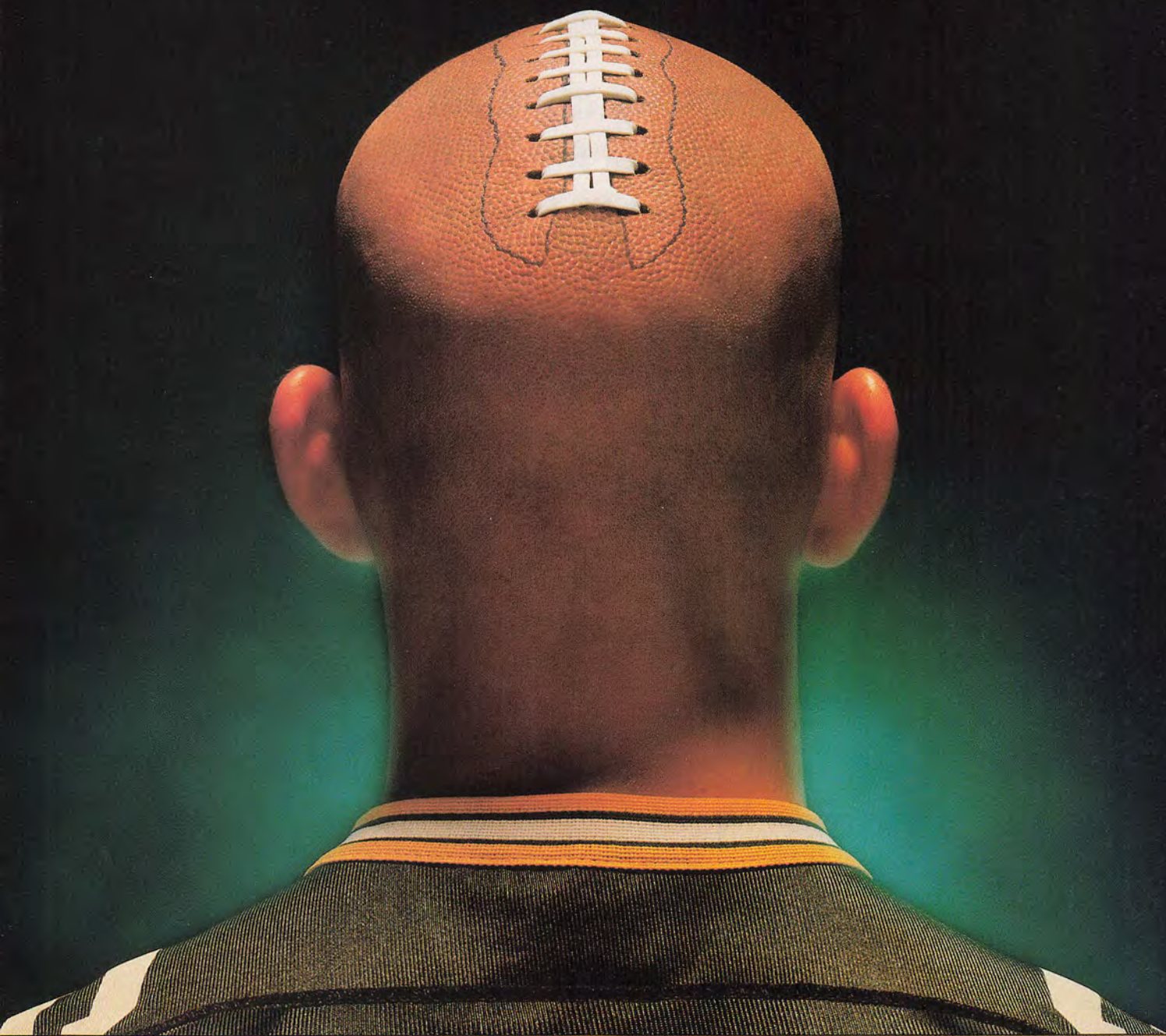
Somehow, the Colts averaged more than 56,000 for home games last year despite a 3-13 record. But in reality, those fans never have had much to cheer for during the team's stay in Indianapolis. The Irsays long ago buried the welcome mat. Polian's job is to dig it up, dust it off and give the fans a reason to fill the dome to capacity.

His record of achievement says he'll do just that. But if he has missed on either Mora or Manning, nothing he has done in the past will cushion the fall.

TSN

Senior writer Paul Attner covers the NFL for THE SPORTING NEWS.

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SCOUTING

All Manning and Leaf will be expected to do is produce right away

BY DAN POMPEI

Peyton Manning or Ryan Leaf? The debate didn't end on draft day. In fact, it could rage for years. The quarterbacks have been compared as if they were about to step into a boxing ring. One comes from quarterback royalty; the other has acted like he thought he *was* royalty at times. One is a natural-born leader; the other ... well, that aspect of his game is debatable. One has a pistol of an arm; the other has a cannon. One is built

like a small forward in basketball; the other is built like a linebacker. One is a finished product; the other is a work in progress. One wears Adidas; the other dons Nike.

One always will be the right pick; the other always will be the wrong one.

Colts general manager Bill Polian cast his vote for Manning with the first pick in the draft, and Chargers G.M. Bobby Beathard got the man he really wanted when Leaf was available on the next pick.

Both personnel men then took great care to ensure their quarterback had plenty of help. The Colts drafted two highly regarded receivers for Manning in Jerome Pathon and E.G. Green. Polian and coach Jim Mora also decided to shuffle their offensive line, with last year's No. 1 pick, Tarik Glenn, moving from guard to left tackle; last year's No. 2 pick, Adam Meadows, moving from left tackle to right tackle; and last year's right tackle, Tony Mandarich, moving to guard.

The most important move the Chargers made may have been the hiring of June Jones, a longtime NFL quarterback guru, to work with Leaf. Then they spent most of their free-agent money on offen-

sive help for Leaf, as Beathard purchased a left tackle (John Jackson), a guard (Aaron Taylor) and a running back (Natrone Means). Beathard also gave up a first-round pick in 2000 to draft receiver Mikhael Ricks in the second round.

So both passers have been set up to succeed. Manning, it seems, will develop into a better Bernie Kosar. Leaf, surely, is a young John Elway. But they may look more like Rick Mirer and Heath Shuler this year if it takes them time to learn their respective systems and to become accustomed to NFL speed.

But considering what the Colts and Chargers will be paying, Leaf and Manning need to start producing sooner rather than later.



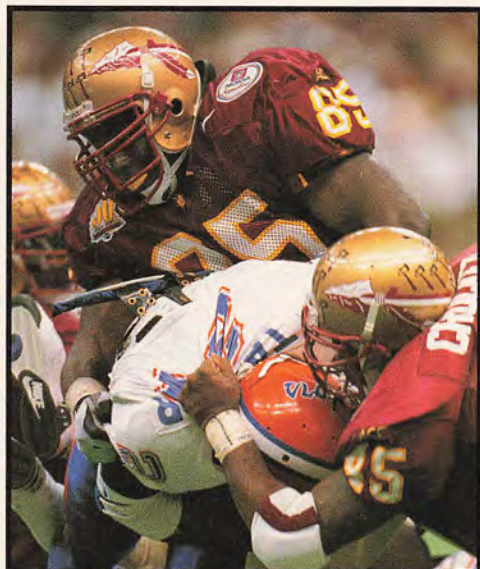
BOB LEVERONE / TSN

The Colts were sold on Manning's many attributes and made him the first pick in the draft. Was it the right choice? Well, that definitely is something to watch for over the next few seasons.

THE NFL

IMPACT ROOKIES

- 1. Andre Wadsworth, DE, Cardinals.** Playing on the same line with Eric Swann and Simeon Rice should give Wadsworth (right, dragging down fellow first-rounder Fred Taylor) plenty of one-on-one pass-rushing opportunities, and he should take advantage of many of them. No rookie is more NFL-ready.
- 2. Curtis Enis, RB, Bears.** The Bears plan on riding his young, fresh legs. This should be a good offense for Enis, as long as the other players execute.
- 3. Robert Edwards, RB, Patriots.** As long as he can hold off Sedrick Shaw, Edwards should get plenty of action. And like Curtis Martin before him, Edwards should benefit from opponents being forced to key on Drew Bledsoe and the passing game.
- 4. Duane Starks, CB, Ravens.** Starks steps into a defense on the rise. The Ravens' pass rush should prevent Starks from having to stick with receivers for inordinate amounts of time, and he can learn from old pro Rod Woodson.
- 5. John Avery, RB, Dolphins.** Don't expect him to start, but he should be able to make an impact as a third-down back and a return man. Avery should benefit from a simplified Miami offense.
- 6. Hines Ward, WR, Steelers.** Leave it to Bill Cowher and the Steelers' coaching staff to find a way to get the most out of Ward, who played wide receiver, quarterback and running back at Georgia. He's another player who probably won't start, but Cowher will find a way to get the ball in his hands.



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

BEST OFFSEASONS

Cardinals No team got more out of the draft. Their booty included defensive end Andre Wadsworth, safety Corey Chavous and offensive tackle Anthony Clement, as well as an additional first-round pick next year and receiver/return man Eric Metcalf. Adrian Murrell should improve the running game. The Cardinals also improved their coaching staff with the hiring of Marc Trestman as offensive coordinator.



49ers



They made solid additions at linebacker (Winfred Tubbs), defensive end (Gabe Wilkins), cornerback (Antonio Langham, R.W. McQuarters), tight end (Irv Smith) and backup quarterback (Ty Detmer). But the 49ers may miss Dana Stubblefield and William Floyd, and the offensive line still looks shaky.

Raiders



They hired a bright, young coach in Jon Gruden and apparently gave him some influence. They got rid of players who had to go, such as defensive tackle Chester McGlockton and cornerback Larry Brown. And they had what appears to be a good draft, selecting cornerback Charles Woodson, offensive tackle Mo Collins, defensive tackle Leon Bender and fullback Jon Ritchie, among others.

Dolphins



Jimmy Johnson picked up two of the best free agents available in safety Brock Marion and guard Kevin Donnalley. He also pitched his antiquated offensive playbook for a slimmed-down version to be administered by new coordinator Kippy Brown. But Johnson may have been able to do more than he did in the draft.

Redskins



Both were overpaid and expectations are going to be unrealistic, but Dana Stubblefield and Dan Wilkinson should have an immediate effect on what was one of the softest defensive fronts in football. In addition, the Redskins picked up two future first-round picks for underachieving defensive tackle Sean Gilbert.

WORST OFFSEASONS

Packers



They endured the traditional post-Super Bowl raid, losing cornerback Doug Evans, safety Eugene Robinson, defensive end Gabe Wilkins, guard Aaron Taylor, running back Edgar Bennett and punter Craig Hentrich. Plus, they nearly lost defensive end Reggie White and coach Mike Holmgren. The good news is the Packers have young, capable players ready to replace most of the departed veterans, and G.M. Ron Wolf used all of his skill and luck to acquire defensive lineman Vonnie Holliday in the draft.

Jets



They traded away most of their draft in the deals for Bill Parcells and running back Curtis Martin, who has yet to prove he is an elite back. Parcells also dumped talented veterans he believed didn't fit, such as defensive end Hugh Douglas, receiver Jeff Graham, fullback Lorenzo Neal and running back Adrian Murrell.

Saints



Losing tight end Irv Smith and linebacker Winfred Tubbs—two of their better players—to the division rival 49ers hurt. The Saints also might miss cornerback Eric Allen, who was traded to the Raiders, and defensive end Darren Mickell, who quit. The Saints really needed to do something at quarterback. But running back Lamar Smith may turn out to be a great signing, and the Saints picked up some decent players in the draft.

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The Sporting News expert league commissioners handle the rest. They're available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week via our 1-800 line during sign-ups! Talk to 'em about player switches, or do it yourself through the Internet.

You will compete on the League (25 teams per League), Division (12 leagues form a 300 team division) and Overall Grand Prize levels. One lucky winner will take home a Grand Prize of \$25,000, with many more winning weekly, league and division prizes.

Bi-weekly reports are included in your entry fee. These reports will include your team summary, league summary, the top 25 division leaders and the top 25 teams overall. Weekly reports are also available for a small charge via mail, fax or Internet.

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Transactions:

- 5 units (\$2.50) for each Bench move.
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Other Rules and Information:

1) If the 1998 NFL season does not start as planned, TSN Fantasy Football Challenge reserves the right to modify the game as it believes will best accommodate fair competition for all participants. If there exists an extended work stoppage in NFL, TSN Fantasy Challenge may, at its own discretion, modify or cancel the game. Further, TSN Fantasy Football Challenge reserves the right to revise any rules to improve The Sporting News Fantasy Football Challenge. 2) No employees of TSN Fantasy Football Challenge or their families are eligible to win. 3) NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. To receive a copy of the official rules and a one-time team selection entry form void of all services, send your name, address, social security number, date of birth and telephone number printed on a 3x5 card along with a letter-size, self-addressed, stamped envelope to: TSN Fantasy Football Challenge, P.O. Box 260467, Lakewood, CO 80226-0467. One request per household. One request per envelope. All requests must be postmarked by August 21, 1998 and received by August 26, 1998. One-time team selection forms must be postmarked no later than August 28, 1998 and received no later than September 3, 1998. 4) You must be 18 years or older to participate. 5) Void where prohibited by law. 6) Not all the official rules are contained in this ad. Managers Kit contains all of the official rules. 7) For questions regarding the rules of The Sporting News Fantasy Football Challenge, call 1-800-789-8980. 8) The Sporting News reserves the right to modify any rules, regulations, or deadlines to improve the 1998 Football Challenge. 9) TSN Fantasy Football Challenge is not responsible for delayed, lost or misdirected mail.

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All phone and fax orders must be received by 11:59 pm EST on Saturday September 5, 1998.

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SCOUTING THE NFL

PROVE IT



Tony Banks, QB, Rams. Management has been plenty patient. Now it's time for Banks to start justifying it.

Jeff Blake, QB, Bengals. Perhaps he never was as good as we thought. Or perhaps he is better than he played last year.

Tony Brackens, DE, Jaguars. Is he a Pro Bowler or forever a player on the verge?

Junior Bryant, DT, 49ers. The 49ers let Dana Stubblefield go in part because they had confidence in Bryant.

Kerry Collins, QB, Panthers. The Panthers chose to give him his freedom after this season rather than give him \$6 million. Collins can make it look like a bad decision.

Trent Dilfer, QB, Bucs. He has taken his game to another level, but what stood between the Bucs and the NFC championship game last year was their passing game. Dilfer wanted more help, and now he has Bert Emanuel and Jacques Green.

Alvin Harper, WR, Saints. The Bucs were strike one. The Redskins were strike two. Guess what that makes the Saints?

Bobby Hoyer, QB, Eagles. Is he the next Ron Jaworski—or the next Ty Detmer, the man he's replacing?

Mitchell had better get it done in the postseason or he may be on his way out.

John Michels, OT, Packers. After two disappointing seasons, it's time for Michels to show he wasn't a first-round bust.

Scott Mitchell, QB, Lions. He puts up great numbers during the regular season but has laid two enormous eggs in the playoffs. With rookie Charlie Batch breathing down his neck, Mitchell must win in the post-season.

Nate Newton, G, Cowboys. He stayed in shape this offseason for a change, but it will take more than dietary willpower for Newton, now 36, to show he isn't washed up.

Lawrence Phillips, RB, Dolphins. If he isn't a great player, he probably isn't worth keeping around.

Chris Sanders, WR, Oilers. Now that Steve McNair has a year of experience and Yancey Thigpen will demand double-teams, the excuse well is dry.

Otis Smith, CB, Jets. Every season, every game, every play.

Bryan Still, WR, Chargers. The split end must justify the means.

Ted Washington, DT, Bills. So, he's worth more than Bruce Smith, is he?

Tyrone Wheatley, RB, Giants. How many chances does a man get?

Dan Wilkinson, DT, Redskins. A big contract doesn't make a player better, but perhaps a change of scenery will do some good.

Dan Williams, DE, Chiefs. Can he stay healthy for consecutive seasons?

Hot assistants

These coordinators should garner the most interest for coaching jobs after the '98 season:

- **Brian Billick, Vikings.** He has earned respect as one of the premier offensive coordinators in the league and has great tools to work with. The next step for such coaches usually is consideration for a head-coaching job.
- **Gunther Cunningham, Chiefs.** He gets overlooked, but he does an excellent job with the Chiefs' defense. If he can get Chester McGlockton and Leslie O'Neal to play and the K.C. defense dominates, it will be difficult to overlook Cunningham.
- **John Fox, Giants.** He did a tremendous job with the Giants' defense last season but was considered too green for a head-coaching job. If he can follow up his '97 performance with a similar performance this year, Fox won't be considered green for long.
- **Jim Haslett, Steelers.** The surest route to a head-coaching job is through the Steelers. Dom Capers and Chan Gailey became coaches after being coordinators under Bill Cowher; Haslett may be next.
- **Gary Kubiak, Broncos.** If Kubiak can get the Broncos on another roll and overcome the stigma of working for an offensive-minded coach, he'll get some attention.
- **Sherm Lewis, Packers.** Like Kubiak, he battles the perception that the coach he works for really is calling all the shots. But Lewis remains a candidate who can't be ignored.
- **Dave McGinnis, Cardinals.** He is in charge of a defense that has a great capacity for improvement with the additions of Andre Wadsworth and Corey Chavous.
- **Mike Shula, Bucs.** If the Bucs win big this year, other teams will be searching for some of that Tony Dungy magic.

Coaches on the hot seat

Bruce Coslet, Bengals. He hasn't had much of a chance, but this team needs to start showing improvement. Pronto.

Dennis Erickson, Seahawks. Management would have replaced him last year if it had hired a general manager or a G.M./coach. Erickson probably has to turn around the Seahawks in 1998 to stick around.

Kevin Gilbride, Chargers. It's too early to expect much of Gilbride, but his tempestuous relationship with the club's front office and the media could make him vulnerable.

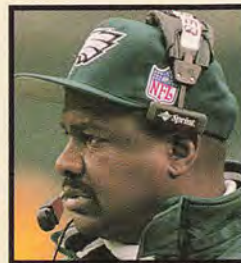
Dennis Green, Vikings. He's in the last year of his contract and could have a new set of bosses who may want to put their stamp on the team.

Ted Marchibroda, Ravens. Art Modell extended Ozzie Newsome's contract but not Marchibroda's, whose deal expires after this season.

Ray Rhodes, Eagles. He may need to win this season to smooth over hard feelings with management.

Norv Turner, Redskins. John Kent Cooke expresses supreme confidence in his coach, but he shelled out big money for talent in the offseason. Was he giving Turner the rope to hang himself?

Dave Wannstedt, Bears. Patience has worn thin after five years of floundering.



Ray Rhodes

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SCOUTING THE NFL

They'll be missed

Marcus Allen, running back, Chiefs. Even at 37, he was the best goal-line back in the business. The Chiefs will miss his leadership as much as his touchdowns.

Chan Gailey, offensive coordinator, Steelers. The development of Kordell Stewart and the evolution of the Pittsburgh passing game can be attributed to Gailey.

Marv Levy, coach, Bills. The understated, underrated Levy took his team to four consecutive Super Bowls, but the manner in which he conducted himself was more impressive than his level of achievement.

Sam Mills, middle linebacker, Panthers. This little guy was one of the league's all-time success stories. It's a shame he retired because the league needs more like him.

Bill Polian, general manager, Panthers. He was as responsible for the team's quick rise as anyone. The Panthers' wild off-season spending may be proof that Polian was the steady force.

Steve Tasker, wide receiver, Bills. He turned grunt work into an art form and will be remembered as one of the league's greatest special teams players ever. The Bills will miss his tackles; the league will miss his class.

George Young, general manager, Giants. One of the league's shrewdest architects, it is appropriate Young retired before the millennium rather than being dragged into the next century kicking and screaming.



Marcus Allen

Things we'd like to see in '98

■ Mike Holmgren sign a contract extension to remain coach of the Packers. If Holmgren leaves to become a general manager elsewhere, he may miss Ron Wolf more than he dreamed possible.

■ Dan Marino and Reggie White finding whatever it is Warren Moon and Darrell Green are taking.

■ Robert Smith staying healthy for a full season.

■ Chris Chandler staying healthy for a full game.

■ Ike Hilliard staying healthy for a full quarter.

■ The Buccaneers and their fans rewarded for years of frustration—and for building a team the right way.

■ Jake Plummer patting fannies—of his teammates after scoring touchdowns.

■ Giants quarterback Danny Kanell engineering a come-from-behind victory on the road.

■ Panthers linebacker Kevin Greene lined up

against 49ers right tackle Derrick Deese on third-and-long. With the game on the line.

■ The most "mature" coaching staff in football—the Rams—instituting some maturity into a team desperately in need of it.

■ Mike Ditka and Ray Rhodes locked in a staredown in a playoff game.

■ Bill Parcells against the Patriots. Over and over.

■ A meeting between former Raiders defensive tackle Chester McGlockton, now of the Chiefs, and Raiders quarterback Jeff George in the Oakland backfield. These two were meant for one another.

■ Jon Gruden allowed to coach the Raiders without any input from that notorious meddler ... you know, Tim Brown.

■ Steelers linebacker Greg Lloyd acting like a decent human being.

■ The Oilers playing a season without distractions.

■ The Seahawks, Colts and Bears not being decimated by injuries.

■ The Broncos' offensive line overlooked and underrated again.

■ Deion Sanders thrown at.



Danny Kanell

Who's in control here?

With only four new coaches for 1998, you may think there won't be a lot of change in the NFL this season. But you would be wrong. Though only Dallas, Buffalo, Indianapolis and Oakland changed coaches, there are 15 new coordinators in the league, five of whom will work under one of the four new coaches. So look for plenty of playbook upheaval—and unpredictability—this season.

Coordinator	Team	Side of ball	Comment
Dana Bible	Eagles	Offense	Jon Gruden's replacement comes to the Eagles from Stanford, where he was criticized for not getting the most out of his players.
Kippy Brown	Dolphins	Offense	He was promoted from running backs coach to streamline what had become a complicated and antiquated offense.
John Bunting/ Peter Giunta	Rams	Defense	This duo, with a combined 23 years of NFL experience, was promoted to replace defensive coordinator Bud Carson, who retired after 24 NFL seasons.
Bill Callahan	Raiders	Offense	The Eagles' former offensive line coach will help Gruden reintroduce some of the West Coast passing concepts to the Raiders.
Ted Cottrell	Bills	Defense	Wade Phillips promoted him from linebackers coach to help run the defense.
Gil Haskell	Panthers	Offense	He'll bring some of the Packers' offensive spice to Carolina.
Tom Moore	Colts	Offense	Most known for his work with the Super Bowl Steelers, he also helped run the Lions' and Saints' offenses in recent years.
Joe Pendry	Bills	Offense	Had mixed reviews when he was running the Panthers' offense, but Wade Phillips was glad to get him.
Jimmy Raye	Chiefs	Offense	Plans to open up the offense after being promoted from running backs coach to take over for Paul Hackett, who left to become coach at USC.
Willie Shaw	Raiders	Defense	A few years ago, he had some success overseeing the Rams' defense under Rich Brooks; now he inherits the NFL's worst defense.
Ray Sherman	Steelers	Offense	Is the Steelers' third offensive coordinator under Bill Cowher, following Ron Erhardt and Chan Gailey.
Rusty Tillman	Colts	Defense	Also has a lot of experience with special teams, but he'll be in charge of Jim Mora's first Indy defense.
Marc Trestman	Cardinals	Offense	His offensive philosophies are similar to those of former Arizona offensive coordinator Jim Fassel, and the Cardinals wanted to get back to that.
Ernie Zampese	Patriots	Offense	The veteran offensive guru comes from the Cowboys to replace Larry Kennan.

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Pro Football Starts
College Football Starts
Baseball Road Trips

SEPTEMBER 1998

U.S. Open Tennis, New York, NY
MLB Playoffs
Ryder Cup, Brookline, MA
Baseball Road Trips

OCTOBER 1998

World Series, TBA
Pro Hockey Starts

NOVEMBER 1998

Pro Basketball Starts
College Basketball Starts

DECEMBER 1998

College Bowl Games
NFL Playoffs

JANUARY 1999

NFL Super Bowl, Miami, FL
NHL All Star Game, Tampa Bay, FL
Orange Bowl, Miami, FL
Rose Bowl, Pasadena, CA

FEBRUARY 1999

NFL Pro Bowl, Honolulu, HI
NBA All Star Game, Philadelphia, PA
Daytona 500, Daytona, FL

MARCH 1999

Spring Training
NCAA Final Four, St. Petersburg, FL

APRIL 1999

Pro Baseball Starts
The Masters, Augusta, GA
NBA & NHL Playoffs

MAY 1999

Kentucky Derby, Louisville, KY
Indy 500, Indianapolis, IN
NBA & NHL Playoffs
Baseball Road Trips

JUNE 1999

U.S. Open Golf, Pinehurst, NC
NBA & NHL Playoffs
Baseball Road Trips

JULY 1999

MLB All Star Game, Boston, MA
Football Induction, Canton, OH
Baseball Induction, Cooperstown, NY
Baseball Road Trips

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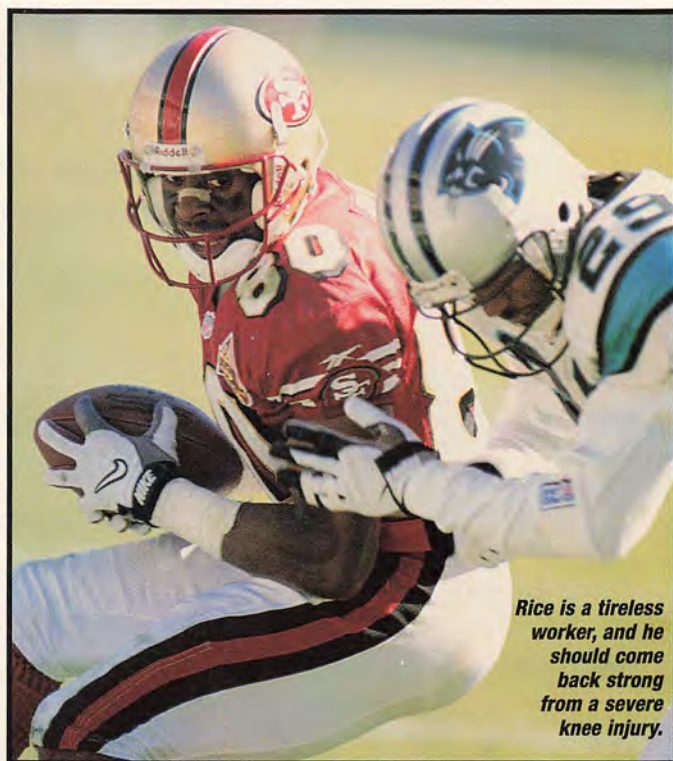
SCOUTING THE NFL

On the spot

1. **Jerry Rice, WR, 49ers.** Doubt him. He dares you. Rice probably will come back from his knee problems stronger than ever, and he might just take the 49ers to the Super Bowl. This was the first major injury of his career, so it isn't like he's all beat up.
2. **Chris Spielman, LB, Bills.** It takes a serious man to come back from a serious injury. And you won't find a more serious man than Spielman, who will find a way to overcome a vertebrae fusion the same way he overcame a torn pectoral muscle and countless other injuries.
3. **Curtis Conway, WR, Bears.** After missing nine games with

injuries last year, Conway is itching to get back on the field. Everything was just starting to come together for him last year at the time of his first injury, so he could come back in a big way.

4. **Brad Johnson, QB, Vikings.** Back surgeries often end football careers, so it will be interesting to see how Johnson responds. He's young and athletic enough to overcome it. And the Vikings really need him.
5. **Errict Rhett, RB, Ravens.** After being ignored on the Bucs' bench last season, Rhett could make an impact with his new team. He should be hitting his peak as a running back, and he'll have a good line in front of him.



Rice is a tireless worker, and he should come back strong from a severe knee injury.

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

MUST-SEE TV MUST-SEE TV MUST-SEE TV

- WEEK 1:** **Oakland at Kansas City.** One of the best rivalries in football, even when the Raiders are down.
- WEEK 2:** **Tampa Bay at Green Bay.** This game should determine quickly if the balance of power has swung in the NFC Central.
- WEEK 3:** **Dallas at N.Y. Giants.** If the Cowboys are back, they can prove it by beating the defending division champions on the road.
- WEEK 4:** **New Orleans at Indianapolis.** Jim Mora gets his first crack at his former team.
- WEEK 5:** **San Diego at Indianapolis.** Ryan Leaf and Peyton Manning go head to head, only adding to the debate over who should have been selected first.
- WEEK 6:** **Atlanta at N.Y. Giants.** Dan Reeves goes against his former team for the first time.
- WEEK 7:** **N.Y. Jets at New England.** The only way this could get better is if Bill Parcells and Bob Kraft strapped on jocks.
- WEEK 8:** **Pittsburgh at Kansas City.** This could be a preview of the AFC championship game.
- WEEK 9:** **San Francisco at Green Bay.** Who has the best team in football? This game could provide the answer.
- WEEK 10:** **Carolina at San Francisco.** Kevin Greene returns to the Bay in an NFC West showdown.
- WEEK 11:** **Denver at Kansas City.** The Chiefs have a score to settle with the Broncos, who knocked them out of the playoffs last season.
- WEEK 12:** **Miami at New England.** Jimmy Johnson and Bill Parcells square off in a battle of AFC East titans.
- WEEK 13:** **Pittsburgh at Detroit.** Enjoy your Thanksgiving turkey with Jerome Bettis and Barry Sanders slugging it out.
- WEEK 14:** **St. Louis at Philadelphia.** Dick Vermeil goes home after all these years.
- WEEK 15:** **Pittsburgh at Tampa Bay.** Two old-school teams battle it out in an interconference clash.
- WEEK 16:** **San Francisco at New England.** This is the kind of game that separates the men from the boys.
- WEEK 17:** **Washington at Dallas.** This would be a fitting way for the NFC East to be decided.

And the winner is ...

Because the **Broncos** never quite had the look of a dynasty ... and because they have scattered **Packers** across the land ... and because, though they are game, the **Cowboys** creak like an old wood floor ... and because Kordell Stewart might need a bit more seasoning before the **Steelers** win the big one ... and because the **Chiefs** have to win one postseason game before they can win three ... the **49ers** are the logical pick to walk away from Pro Player Stadium on January 31 clutching the Lombardi Trophy. **TSN**

Senior writer Dan Pompei covers the NFL for THE SPORTING NEWS.

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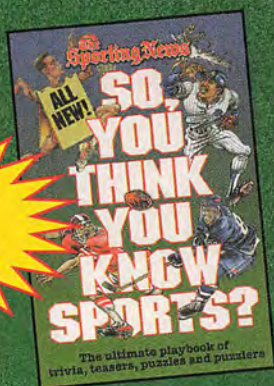
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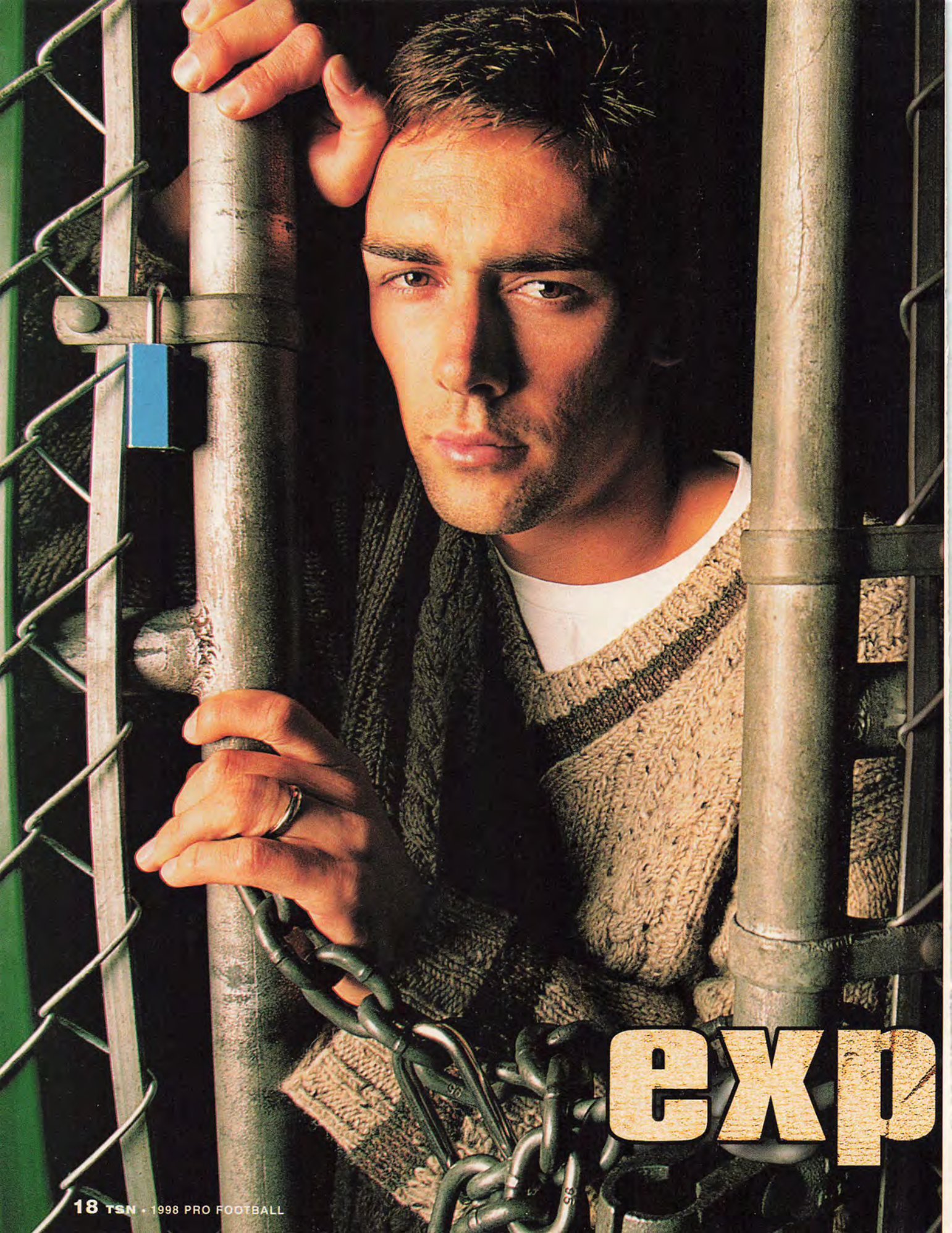
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STORY BY BILL MINUTAGLIO

PHOTO BY BOB LEVERONE / TSN

**Jason Sehorn isn't
who you think he is.**

**As if his on-field
performance isn't
distinctive enough,
his background and
skin color make him a
cornerback like none other.**

A JOLT to ectations

Whitney Sehorn is sitting at a bar on the roof of a hotel in Jamaica. The long-limbed former volleyball player from the University of Southern California is staring down at an 800-meter straightaway. On it, three men are moving almost as if they are a single, rocketing amoeba. Locked in the grunting clump are Herschel Walker, famous for his world-class sprinter's speed and his 1,000-situps-a-day routine; Olympic champion hurdler and international track star Allen Johnson; and multi-talented Steelers quarterback Kordell Stewart.

Suddenly, there is a murmur among the hundreds of onlookers. It builds a little. People are pointing toward a fourth, unlikely looking runner. He is a white guy wearing a little white cap and sunglasses. He looks like a dimpled cabana boy from a posh country club, maybe even a smooth, young golfer running late for his tee time.

Now, Sehorn is smiling and nodding her head. The guy in the silly hat and the shades is the man she met in college when they both were getting their ankles taped. It's her husband—a starting cornerback for the New York Giants. And on this April afternoon, he's about to win the race by passing the trio of more famous athletes and allowing them a nice view of his back as he blows across the finish line.

In fact, when this special anniversary edition of the "Superstars" competition is done, Jason Sehorn will have won the whole thing. He will finish at the top of almost all the individual events—from golf to swimming, from running to bicycling. He'll beat Olympic gold medalists, boxing champions and skiing kings—just like a few months earlier, when he effortlessly won the celebrity slam-dunk competition during the NBA All-Star Game weekend.

But Whitney Sehorn's smile is suddenly fractured when she hears a woman saying: "Sure, Sehorn won. Look at him. He's a golden California boy. He grew up golfing, swimming and riding bikes. Nobody else out here did those things."

Whitney Sehorn seethes but doesn't speak.

She wants to spin around and tell the woman about how her husband was raised by a single mother making \$5,000 a year. That for years, his family danced on and off with welfare. That the Sehorns had no car, no furniture, no new clothes. That there wasn't a lot of "golfing"—and Sehorn's shoes used to be held together with duct tape. Sehorn lived in 20 different places as a kid. His mother barely kept the family alive by cutting hair in a tiny shop one floor above an inner-city bar-and-grill. Sehorn often slept on the floor of the shop because there was no place else to sleep. When Sehorn was 9, he had to care for his 2-year-old brother—taking the little kid on cross-town buses, making the macaroni and cheese, getting the toddler ready for bed—because their mother was working late.

Whitney Sehorn knows all about it.

She also knows that when Sehorn, with his toothy grin and tanned skin, arrived at his first Giants training camp, he was instantly dubbed "90210"—as in *Beverly Hills 90210*—and told to join the safeties on the practice field.

Based on his looks, his natural skills and his alma mater, he had to be a blessed boy from the West Coast. Probably a surfer dude. Maybe even a silver-spooner raised on a diet of lazy afternoons, tennis and margaritas with Alicia Silverstone. Maybe accustomed to touring the Hollywood hills with the top down and a wispy somebody named Heather curled up in the passenger seat.

Whitney Sehorn knew that, like the woman in Jamaica, they had it all wrong.

Most of all, she knew people never would have bet that Sehorn

would become the only white cornerback who was a regular NFL starter since Atlanta's Scott Case in 1989—and maybe the best all-around athlete in pro football.

"The thing about Jason is that he is so different than any person I have ever met," his wife says, not long after watching him smoke Walker, Johnson, Stewart, Lennox Lewis, J.J. Stokes, Dorsey Levens, Keyshawn Johnson and all the others under the bright sun in Jamaica.

One day, sitting by himself in the quiet of an almost empty Giants locker room, Sehorn finally admits the same thing.

"Well, I guess I'm different in the sense that people are always expecting me to be something else," he says with an ever-widening smile.

Two years ago, Nancy Hughes decided to remind Jason Sehorn of his roots. She finally had a car, thanks to her son's multimillion dollar contract to play football, and she drove all over inner-city Sacramento taking pictures. Frame after frame, she recorded visual images of the 20 weed-



Hughes didn't want her son to forget his roots, to forget how far he had come. A collage depicting the family's travails was her gift to Jason on his 25th birthday.

choked, paint-cracked places that the Sehorn family was condemned to live in over the years.

Carefully, as if each photo possessed a painful but somehow precious burden, she created a collage. A photochemical collection turned into a dark, human travelogue. These were Jason Sehorn's roots. She wanted him to have them. Always. On the day Sehorn turned 25, this



Sehorn puts his athleticism to good use on the field. He's fast enough to hang with all the elite receivers and he's big enough to inflict punishment on opposing receivers, runners and quarterbacks.

was the gift from mother to son.

After the usual birthday giggles were uncorked, and long after the fancy paper and stray frosting were gone, he looked at his collage. Over and over again. For a long, long time.

After his parents split up in the mid-1970s, Sehorn's mother raised him alone from the time he was 2. He saw his father only intermittently over the years, and when he went to college he essentially stopped seeing him forever.

His mother was earning \$100 a week and making sure the family moved from apartment to cheaper apartment to save on rent. She needed Jason to be responsible. When she was able to see him play soccer, football, baseball or basketball, she always talked about the way he kept his head. She liked the fact that her little boy was unflappable. Cool, but responsible.

"All I knew is that if you wanted to keep your kids out of trouble, you made sure they were involved in sports," sighs Hughes late one night, after she has spent a long day at her tiny hair salon. She dreamed about her boy being in the Olympics. In the eighth grade, he wrote an essay that said he would play for the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Kansas City Royals.

Meanwhile, his mother searched her son's face, looking for signs that he finally was breaking down as he swept the floors all weekend at her salon and accumulated a thin \$1 in tips. She felt a tear, an aching inside, when she saw him washing dishes in the bar-and-grill on the ground floor. He would hold his hands out, looking for a dollop of understanding from his mother. "Look at my hands," he'd say. "This," his mother would gingerly reply, "is why you want to go to college."

And she lost sleep when a friend said Jason really needed to go to private school. The thought was almost cruel. It was, in the end, the kind of thought that would mutate, transmogrify, into a bigger, gnawing thing. At

the time, food stamps were serving as passports to peace of mind, but "I didn't think that welfare and private school mixed real well," Hughes says now. People make changes, she thought. And her logic told her that if she cut off a lifeline, she would somehow grow stronger.

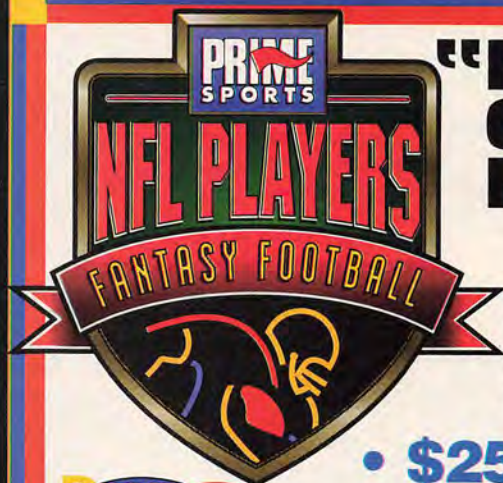
She went off welfare and worked more hours. Jason worked more hours. They found the money for private school, even though there were great, smothering moments of dread as the mother and two kids finally stretched out on their only bed—the foldout couch in their studio apartment—and listened to each other breathe. Nancy looked at her older son. It wasn't cynicism muting his emotions and keeping his breathing measured. He wasn't depressed or jaded.

"Jason always knew how to keep his head," his mother says.

The score was 3-1. It was a night game. You could hear people talking in the stands. There was nothing happening in the outfield. No fly balls. Not a damn thing.

Sehorn spent parts of two summers—the 1989 instructional league and the '90 Appalachian League—in the Chicago Cubs' minor league system. But one night, in the middle of a road stretch that took him from Johnson City, Tenn., to Pulaski, Va., he found himself looking down at his little patch of center field. Looking down, sinking down, wondering if he really had come very far from Sacramento.

On the back of his uniform he knew you could still see where somebody else's name—"Dawson"—had once been stitched. Sehorn began digging his initials in the grass with his cleats. First a "J." Then an "H." Then an "S." He reflected on three more initials—USC—and the possibility of playing football for the Trojans. A thought stuttered and blinked in his head like a no-tell motel's neon come-on: "I can go to USC, fly all over the place, stay in first-class hotels, play in front of 97,000 people."

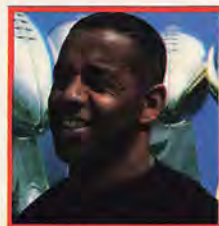


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SCORING

PASSING	PTS.	KICKING	PTS.
Pass for TD 40+ yards	6	Field Goal	3
Pass for TD ≤ 40 yards	3	Extra Point	1
Every 25 yards	1		
Pass for 2 pt conversion	1		
RUSH/RECEIVE	PTS.	DEF/SPECIAL TEAMS	PTS.
Rush/receive TD 40+ yds	9	Defense TD	6
Rush/receive TD ≤ 40 yds	6	Kick/Punt Return TD	6
Every 10 yards (combined rush/rec)	1	Fumble Rec/Int	2
2 pt conversion	2	Safety	2
		Sack	1
BONUS SCORING SCENARIOS			
100 yards Rushing	5	Field Goal ≥ 50 yards	5
100 yards Receiving	5	Defense allows ≤ 6 Points	5
300 yards Passing	5	Defensive Shutout (0 pts scored by opponent)	10
		NFL Player - "Pick of the Week"	Bonus Pts.

* Only best 15 of 17 weekly scores will count toward end of season total.

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Start with a SALARY CAP of \$420. Select your team of 2 Quarterbacks, 3 Running Backs, 4 Receivers/Tight Ends, 2 Kickers, and 1 Defense/Special Team, by entering the player's 3 digit ID# in the adjacent form. Keep the initial roster below for your records.

QUARTERBACKS (Draft 2)				RUNNING BACKS (Draft 3)				RECEIVERS/TIGHT ENDS (Draft 4)				KICKERS (Draft 2)				DEFENSE/SPECIAL TEAMS (Draft 1)			
ID #	NAME	TEAM	SALARY	ID #	NAME	TEAM	SALARY	ID #	NAME	TEAM	SALARY	ID #	NAME	TEAM	SALARY	ID #	NAME	TEAM	SALARY
100	Aikman, Troy (DAL)	44	300	300	Abdul-Jabbar, Karim (MIA)	44	344	341	McPhail, Jerrie (MIA)	20	515	559	Pickens, Carl (CIN)	41	719	Jaeger, Jeff (CHI)	24	24	
101	Banks, Tony (STL)	37	301	301	Allen, Terry (WAS)	44	345	342	Means, Natrone (SD)	44	516	560	Pritchard, Mike (SEA)	32	720	Johnson, Norm (PIT)	30	30	
102	Blake, Jeff (CIN)	37	302	302	Alstott, Mike (TB)	36	346	343	Mitchell, Brian (WAS)	21	517	561	Proehl, Ricky (STL)	38	721	Kasay, John (CAR)	31	31	
103	Bledsoe, Drew (NE)	53	303	303	Anders, Kimble (KC)	33	347	344	Moore, Jerald (STL)	25	518	562	Reed, Andre (BUF)	34	722	Longwell, Ryan (GB)	34	34	
104	Brunell, Mark (JAX)	50	304	304	Anderson, Jamal (ATL)	42	348	345	Morris, Bam (BAL)	40	519	563	Reed, Jake (MIN)	41	723	Mare, Olindo (MIA)	33	33	
105	Case, Stoney (ARZ)	32	305	305	Barber, Tiki (NYG)	37	349	346	Murrell, Adrian (ARZ)	40	520	564	Rice, Jerry (SF)	45	724	Murray, Eddie (MIN)	22	22	
106	Chandler, Chris (ATL)	43	306	306	Bettis, Jerome (PIT)	48	350	347	Phillips, Lawrence (MIA)	35	521	565	Rison, Andre (KC)	41	725	Nedney, Joe (ARZ)	24	24	
107	Collins, Kerry (CAR)	32	307	307	Biakabutuka, Tim (CAR)	29	351	348	Rhett, Errict (TB)	30	522	566	Sanders, Chris (TB)	33	726	Pelfrey, Doug (CIN)	22	22	
108	Collins, Todd (BUF)	32	308	308	Bowie, Larry (WAS)	23	352	349	Salama, Rashaan (CHI)	27	523	567	Sanders, Frank (ARZ)	40	727	Peterson, Todd (SEA)	29	29	
109	Detmer, Ty (SF)	37	309	309	Broussard, Steve (SEA)	34	353	350	Salaam, Rashawn (CHI)	27	524	568	Scott, Darney (CIN)	40	728	Stover, Matt (BAL)	31	31	
110	Dilfer, Trent (TB)	40	310	310	Brown, Gary (SD)	32	354	351	Sanders, Barry (DET)	50	525	569	Sharpe, Shannon (DEN)	40	729	Stoyanovich, Pete (KC)	32	32	
111	Elway, John (DEN)	52	311	311	Byner, Earnest (BAL)	20	355	352	Smith, Antowain (BUF)	35	526	570	Shepherd, Leslie (WAS)	34	730	Vinatieri, Adam (NE)	33	33	
112	Favre, Brett (GB)	59	312	312	Carter, Ki-Jana (CIN)	27	356	353	Smith, Emmitt (DAL)	44	527	571	Smith, Jimmy (JAX)	42	731	Wilkins, Jeff (STL)	30	30	
113	Flutie, Doug (NE)	40	313	313	Centers, Larry (ARZ)	36	357	354	Smith, Lamar (NO)	34	528	572	Solomon, Freddie (PHI)	22					
114	Froette, Gus (WAS)	46	314	314	Davis, Stephen (WAS)	24	358	355	Smith, Robert (MIN)	45	529	573	Stokes, J.J. (SF)	38					
115	George, Jeff (OAK)	56	315	315	Davis, Terrell (DEN)	53	359	356	Stewart, James (JAX)	37	530	574	Thigpen, Yancy (TEN)	40					
116	Graham, Kent (NYG)	44	316	316	Dillon, Troy (NO)	32	360	357	Taylor, Fred (JAX)	36	531	575	Timpson, Michael (PHI)	22					
117	Gibbs, Elvis (KC)	44	317	317	Dillon, Corey (CIN)	43	361	358	Thomas, Thurman (BUF)	38	532	576	Uwaezuoke, Iheanyi (SF)	20					
118	Harbaugh, Jim (IND)	32	318	318	Dunn, Warwick (TB)	42	362	359	Turner, Kevin (PHI)	25	533	577	Walls, Wesley (CAR)	37					
119	Hoying, Bobby (PHI)	42	319	319	Edwards, Robert (NE)	30	363	360	Turner, Kevin (PHI)	25	534	578	Westbrook, Michael (WAS)	38					
120	Humphries, Stan (SD)	30	320	320	Ennis, Curtis (CHI)	36	364	361	Vardell, Tommy (DET)	18	535	579	Wychec, Frank (TEN)	33					
121	Johnson, Brad (MIN)	50	321	321	Faulk, Marshall (IND)	44	365	362	Warren, Chris (DAL)	38	536	580							
122	Johnson, Rob (BUF)	45	322	322	Floyd, William (CAR)	25	366	363	Warren, Lamont (IND)	15	537	581							
123	Kanell, Danny (NYG)	38	323	323	Garner, Charlie (PHI)	39		364	Waters, Ricky (SEA)	43	538	582							
124	Kramer, Erik (CHI)	39	324	324	Gash, Sam (BUF)	20		365	Waters, Ricky (SEA)	43	539	583							
125	Leaf, Ryan (SD)	40	325	325	George, Eddie (TEN)	47		366	Way, Charles (NYG)	33	540	584							
126	Manning, Peyton (IND)	40	326	326	Green, Ahman (SEA)	30		367	Whitely, Tyronne (NYG)	34	541	585							
127	Marino, Dan (MIA)	46	327	327	Hampton, Rodney (NYG)	28		368	Williams, Harvey (OAK)	30	542	586							
128	McNair, Steve (TEN)	41	328	328	Harris, Raymont (CHI)	45		369	Willars, Ray (NO)	27	543	587							
129	Mitchell, Scott (DET)	43	329	329	Harris, Raymont (CHI)	45		370			544	588							
130	Moon, Warren (SEA)	54	330	330	Henderson, William (GB)	19		371			545	589							
131	O'Donnell, Neil (NYJ)	38	331	331	Heyward, Craig (STL)	20		372			546	590							
132	Peele, Rodney (PHI)	32	332	332	Hoard, Leroy (MIN)	24		373			547	591							
133	Plummer, Jake (ARZ)	42	333	333	Holcombe, Robert (STL)	30		374			548	592							
134	Shuler, Heath (NO)	35	334	334	Johnson, Anthony (CAR)	29		375			549	593							
135	Stewart, Kordell (PIT)	52	335	335	Kaufman, Napoleon (OAK)	45		376			550	594							
136	Tastavade Vinny (BAL)	47	336	336	Kirby, Terry (SF)	27		377			551	595							
137	Wuerffel, Danny (NO)	35	337	337	Lane, Fred (CAR)	32		378			552	596							
138	Young, Steve (SF)	53	338	338	Lee, Amp (STL)	47		379			553	597							
139	Zeier, Eric (BAL)	43	339	339	Levens, Dorsey (GB)	47		380			554	598							
			340	340	Martin, Curtis (NYJ)	47		381			555	599							

NOTE: EACH PLAYER'S TEAM DESIGNATION IS BASED ON THEIR TEAM AS OF APRIL 21, 1998.

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- Teams submitted with incorrect or incomplete rosters will have a temporary roster assigned to them.

League Information

- All teams will be placed into 30-team leagues. League formation will be finalized after week 2.
- All entries (up to 30) that are received in the same envelope will be placed in the same league unless otherwise instructed.

Reports

- 6 Reports will be mailed throughout the season which are included in your entry fee.
- Players may upgrade to weekly reports starting with week 3 for \$15. Specify on your order form if you wish to upgrade.

Entry Deadlines

- Entries received via the Internet (www.fantasysportshq.com) or by fax (972-889-5359) must be received no later than **September 5, 1998**.
- Entries received by mail must be postmarked by **September 5, 1998** and received no later than **September 11, 1998** to qualify.

Prize Structure

- Prizes are awarded on League and National Levels.
- 1 in 30 will earn a 4 Day/3 Night Drive Away Vacation to 1 of 70 Resort Location Destinations. Weekly prizes awarded to the Top 20 national winners each week. Only weeks 2 through end of season are eligible for weekly prizes and Highest Single Week prize.
- Touch tone telephone required to access the Interactive phone system.
- Best 15 of 17 scores count toward end of season total.

Salary Upgrades

- 4 salary upgrades will occur throughout the season. Salaries will be increased \$5 for one player at each position based on previous 4 week average score divided by his salary.
- Bye-weeks will be included in the calculation for upgrades.
- Player must be featured on active roster in weeks 5, 8, 11 & 14.

**Customer Service Hours: M-Th 8am to 8pm CST,
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NFL Player - "Pick of the Week"

- Beginning with week 3, one NFL Player will be chosen in advance to receive bonus game points for their on field performance.
- For each roster featuring this player, Prime Sports Interactive will donate \$1 to Special Olympics.

Cost to Play

- \$39.95 for each entry postmarked or faxed by **July 31, 1998**.
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- 2 or more entries included in the same envelope each receive 10 FREE Trades (\$25 value for each player).
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- \$10 discount for "Internet Only" play. Some conditions apply. See our website for more details (www.fantasysportshq.com).

Cost to Trade

- Player trades are unlimited at \$2.50 per trade.
- Players may only be traded for another within the same position.
- Trades may be conducted each week from Tuesday at 12:00 pm CST until the following Sunday at 11:00 am CST.

All trades prior to September 6, 1998 are FREE.

**ENTRIES MUST BE POSTMARKED BY 9/5/98 AND RECEIVED BY 9/11/98 TO BE ELIGIBLE.
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THEN TOTAL YOUR PLAYERS' SALARIES AND MAKE SURE THAT THE
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ONLY ORIGINAL ENTRIES OR PHOTOCOPIES OF ORIGINAL FORM WILL BE ACCEPTED.

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PLAYER ID# SALARY

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He listened to the people talking in the stands for a little longer, their voices like insects leaving some ill-defined noise in his ear. Sehorn made up his mind. He was quitting baseball and setting his sights on a place some people like to call the University of Spoiled Children. First, though, he would spend two years at Shasta Community College in Redding, Calif., where he was a junior college football star and caught 31 touchdown passes in two seasons.

At USC, Dennis Thurman couldn't stop staring at Sehorn. Thurman had put in his years as a Dallas Cowboys defensive back and now he had this, well, surprise on his hands. Stacked at receiver, the USC coaching staff made Sehorn a defensive back.

"The obvious thing was his size, speed and quickness. ... He could run straight ahead and he also had lateral quickness. He had long arms. He had strength in his wrists, hands and forearms. He could change directions," says Thurman, USC's secondary coach since 1993, which was Sehorn's senior season.

And Sehorn found in Thurman the man he says is the best coach he ever had: "Now, Jason, when you go to the NFL ..." is how Thurman would begin his positive-reinforcement head games.

Truth be told, there really wasn't anything else Thurman could do. He had to feed Sehorn's head. Play with it. Thurman saw the spider webs of fear. Maybe, really, he was seeing the sum total of all the twisted and abrupt changes: From slums to USC. From minor league baseball to big-time college football. From junior college receiver to Pac-10 cornerback. From small-school god to big-school unknown. All those spider webs twisting and falling around each other.

"Initially, he was uncomfortable at the corner," Thurman says. "He had to clear the mental part first. But I felt that if he trusted me, I could help him. I knew that he was a more naturally gifted athlete than I ever was."

He also realized that Sehorn had a lot to learn. Against North Carolina, Thurman told Sehorn to cover the pitch man on the option. Instead, Sehorn threw himself kamikaze-like into the quarterback. Thurman told Sehorn one more time to take the pitch man on the option. Once more, he stabbed himself at the quarterback.

Thurman literally dragged Sehorn aside.

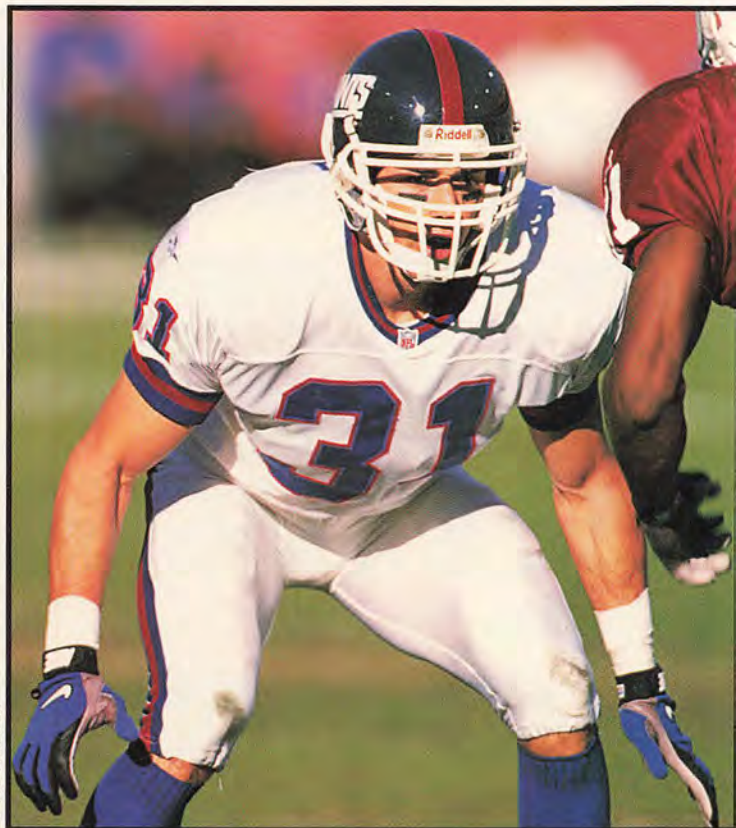
"Jason? Do you know who the pitch man is?" He stared into Sehorn's eyes.

"Sure, Coach, he's the one pitching the ball," said Sehorn, the puppy looking for the master's nod.

There were other, more complex, problems. Sehorn's approach to practice was lackadaisical, and he was kicked off the field once. Thurman tried to go deeper into Sehorn's mind, using the Michael Jordan analogy.

"Look at Jordan," Thurman told Sehorn. "He dominates. In practice. In games. He has all the skills, just like you. But he dominates."

In his senior year, Sehorn had seven interceptions. Scouts came sniff-



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

Sehorn often hears about being the 'white guy' at cornerback and is uneasy with race being thrust into the mix.

ing. "But they stereotyped him. Their attitude was that he should be a safety," Thurman says. He is sure it was because Sehorn was white; by the unspoken rules of the NFL, white men don't play cornerback.

"I'm sure that was it. But I had watched Ronnie Lott and Dennis Smith, and I knew what type of athletes they were," Thurman says. "He has the same attributes but with maybe a little more fluidity in his hips. Forget about the fact that he is white. He is a great physical specimen. That was the shocking thing to me. He could have been a great deathathlete."

"He can basically do anything he wants to do."

A select few

One of the reasons Jason Sehorn's race is noteworthy is because there have been few white cornerbacks in NFL history—and fewer still in recent years—who reasonably could be called "great." It is a position dominated by black players.

If Sehorn, 27, makes the Pro Bowl this season, he would become only the fourth white cornerback to earn such recognition since the 1970 NFL-AFL merger, and the first since Atlanta's Scott Case in 1988. But that was the only Pro Bowl season of Case's 12-year NFL career, so he could hardly be considered a great player.

One white cornerback who deserves that distinction is Roger Wehrli, who made seven Pro Bowl trips with the Cardinals in the 1970s. Wehrli's seven all-star game appearances is equaled or exceeded by only four other cornerbacks—black or white—in NFL history: Willie

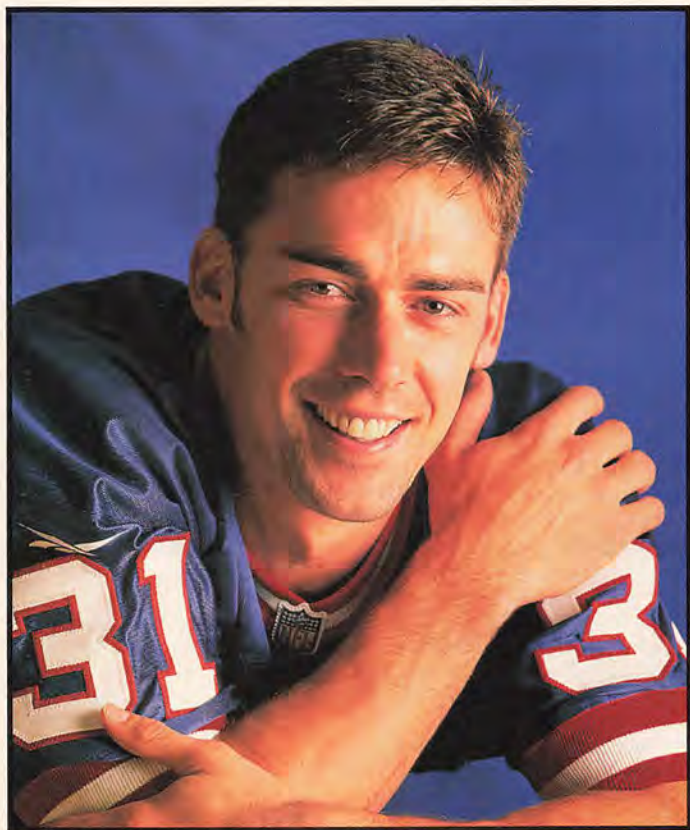
Brown (nine), Mike Haynes (nine), Darrell Green (seven), Rod Woodson (seven) and Lem Barney (seven). Mel Renfro and Ronnie Lott played in 10 Pro Bowls, but in both cases at least half of them were as safeties. Besides Wehrli and Case, only one other white cornerback, the Vikings' Bobby Bryant (1975), has been voted to the Pro Bowl since the merger.

Pro Bowls aside, consider that 85 players have earned all-league recognition at cornerback since 1970 from at least one of six media outlets: THE SPORTING NEWS, The Associated Press, the Professional Football Writers Association, *Pro Football Weekly*, the Newspaper Enterprise Association and United Press International. Of those 85, seven (8.2 percent) were white: Wehrli, Case, Bryant, Kent McCloughan (Raiders, 1970), Pat Fischer (Redskins, 1972, '75), Steve Foley (Broncos, 1978) and Dick LeBeau (Lions, 1970, '71).

White Pro Bowl cornerbacks since 1970

Player, Team	Pro Bowl seasons	Comment
Roger Wehrli, Cardinals	1970-71, '74-77, '79	A deserving Hall of Fame candidate who was stuck on some bad teams.
Bobby Bryant, Vikings	1975	Overshadowed by Page, Eller, Krause, etc., on some dominant Minnesota defenses.
Scott Case, Falcons	1988	Led NFL with 10 interceptions in only Pro Bowl season.

—DAVE SLOAN



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

The Giants made Sehorn their second-round pick (59th overall) in 1994. He called his mother after he signed. Nancy Hughes was in the backyard of her latest residence, a government-subsidized house. She had turned the backyard into her version of Low Rent Riviera and was luxuriating in an inflatable pool from Wal-Mart. As she listened to her son, a thought paddled through her head: "I'm glad somebody in this family has made a good choice."

But when the Giants sized up the 6-2, 210-pound white package and said he would play strong safety, Sehorn felt as if he had made the worst choice of all. He was crushed. He had few friends in New York. It has a snowy, un-California winter. He thought hard about where his career was headed. He called Thurman.

"You don't see the game well enough right now to be a safety. Tell them you have to play cornerback," Thurman said.

Thurman wasn't sure Sehorn would tell anybody anything. He doesn't talk much. That first season, Sehorn was exiled to special teams and mop-up time at safety.

Still, in practice, jaws dropped when Sehorn refused to let Herschel Walker beat him in sprints. People stared at the physical parlor game: Walker turns a corner and picks up speed, Sehorn closes the gap and nudges ahead. Walker drifts inside and takes the lead, Sehorn kicks a little and retakes the lead. On and on it goes, until they somehow reach an agreed-upon threshold. The two men see the envelope—but, in an unspoken truce, they never push beyond it.

Meanwhile, in quiet moments off the field, word spread about something maybe even more unlikely: Sehorn didn't grow up tutored to tie his crew-neck sweater over his shoulders while stepping into Daddy's Jag. His nickname changed. People stopped calling him "90210" and switched to "Species"—after the agile, supernatural creature from the movie with the same name.

By 1996, Sehorn's third season, Zaven Yarialian, then the Giants' secondary coach, was looking for ways to use his speed, jumping ability and strength—especially after Thomas Randolph, the starting cornerback and Sehorn's best friend on the team, was injured in training camp. Yarialian, now the Saints' defensive coordinator, told people he was thinking of moving Sehorn to corner.

"He's a white guy," was the frequent response. "How can he play corner?"

One day, Yarialian was conducting a meeting in the room where the defensive backs huddle to watch film and plot schemes. Slowly, insistently, it all became clear. Yarialian and Sehorn were the only whites in the room. "I wondered if there was some jealousy initially," Yarialian says. "If there was, it went away when people saw him play."

In Sehorn's first start, the '96 season opener against Buffalo, Jim Kelly went to work on him. Wide receiver Eric Moulds took one look at Sehorn and said, "This is six." All game, Buffalo attacked him. Sehorn blitzed on Buffalo's second offensive series, sacking Kelly for a 15-yard loss and forcing a fumble. He yielded four receptions as Kelly threw his way 11 times.

All game long, Sehorn could see it coming. There were times, at the line, when it seemed as if Kelly was staring into Sehorn, completely ignoring the other Giants players. Sehorn felt Kelly boring into him. He swirled into paranoia, then drifted into calm.

"I could understand it. If there hasn't been a white cornerback, they felt that they had to try me. Man, they definitely tried me," Sehorn says. "I've got to say that everybody thought about it. I thought about it. But that just comes with the stereotypes we all place on things."

Later that season, after a win over Miami, Yarialian fought his way through the crowd, searching for Jimmy Johnson. Sehorn had shut down the Dolphins. Still, Yarialian had to know for sure.

"What'd you think of Sehorn?" he asked Johnson.

"We thought we could pick on him," snapped Johnson, who holds back compliments as well as anyone in football. Johnson didn't mention race to Yarialian.

But Giants quarterback Danny Kanell says there are deep, unspoken truths in the NFL. "C'mon. The quarterbacks were looking out there and looking for the white guy. And he handled it," Kanell says.

For his breakout season, Sehorn led the team in interceptions (five) and was third in tackles (97). "The best thing I like about Jason is how he tackles," says Jessie Armstead, the Giants' Pro Bowl linebacker. "He can cover people, but you also find him helping to stop the running game."

Michael Strahan, the Giants' star defensive end, says: "Jason is a big corner who matches up well with some of the big, physical receivers like Michael Irvin. He never plays casual at all. You watch his demeanor and you don't think that what you see on Sundays will come out, but it comes out real quick."

One weird El Nino day in New Jersey, Sehorn is inadvertently dissecting that quiet demeanor.

There is snow on the ground, but the crews at the Meadowlands sports complex are wearing shorts because the March temperature has vaulted to 80 degrees. The weather is schizophrenic. And, in a way, so is Jason Sehorn. Off the field, walking through the dank tunnels under the stadium, he plays the wet-nosed, loose-limbed pet with everyone who comes near him. He bounds across the carpeted locker room. He does a Ringling Brothers send-up of how clownish he looked when he played pickup hoops with a borrowed pair of size-3,000 shoes from Jayson Williams, his running buddy who plays center for the New Jersey Nets.

"I know I never show emotion, even after a sack or an interception," Sehorn admits as he settles into a chair and leans his head against the cinder-block wall. The locker room is now empty. It's late on a Friday afternoon. For a second, he almost seems weary.

"I might hug a teammate, but usually there is nothing. I'll just drop the ball and run to the sideline. I owe it all to my coaches in junior college. I mean, I had 17 touchdowns my first year there as a receiver. They told me to pretend like I did it all the time. ... I decided to never get in somebody's face. There is not a receiver in the NFL who can say that I have ever said anything to him in a bad way," he says, staring at some far-off point.

Then, he remembers one thing. He remembers the only time in pro football a human being on another team has heard him raise his voice. It was last year against Arizona. He was matched with Rob Moore on a slant over the middle. Sehorn speared a hand in and slapped the ball down.

"Quit grabbing me," Moore screamed.

"Tell your quarterback to throw a better ball," Sehorn snapped back. Months later, he is still in awe, almost depressed, that he spoke up. So is his mother. His mother—the one who defined his life through a photo collage—knows all about how Sehorn hides his voice. He is like the indigenous people who refuse to have their pictures taken because they know it will capture their soul.

Corner order: "Super-size us"

BY SCOTT FOWLER

Bryant Westbrook was a great college cornerback at Texas. He could run, cover and swivel his hips like John Travolta whenever he needed to keep a receiver blanketed.

But there were two key statistics that Westbrook knew meant the difference between being the No. 5 overall pick, which the Lions made him in the 1997 NFL draft, and No. 25: his height and weight. "I'm 6 feet tall and 200 pounds," he says. "If I had been exactly the same player but three inches shorter and 15 pounds lighter, I would probably have dropped into the late first round. Maybe early second."

Every NFL team wants a big cornerback now, and every team with a good one wants badly to keep him.

Defensive coordinators watch a cornerback like the Rams' Ryan McNeil (6-2, 192) leap into the air and come down with the ball (he led the NFL with nine interceptions last season). They hear McNeil say this: "Close to half of those interceptions would have been impossible except for my height."

And they dream.

"You'd love to have every one of your corners be big," Steelers defensive coordinator Jim Haslett says, "because if they're not, you're going to get overmatched."

As NFL teams have increased their reliance on tall receivers and West Coast offenses, defenses have adjusted. Starting at least one cornerback who is at least 6-0 and 190 has become as necessary as a pass-rushing end for most successful defenses.

"The quick-timing passing game and the trend toward big receivers

has turned this into a basketball game at times," Panthers coach Dom Capers says. "It's about body positioning. The big receiver is like a forward, blocking out his man so he can't get to the basket on a rebound."

That's why the Panthers raided the Packers for Doug Evans in the offseason. Evans (6-1, 190) hasn't made the Pro Bowl, but he is the second-highest paid cornerback in the NFL, behind the Cowboys' Deion Sanders (6-1, 185), with a \$4.5 million average salary.

The Panthers already had a decent cornerback on the right side in Tyrone Poole, but he is only 5-8. So Carolina super-sized the position. It cost a lot more than 39 cents, though: Evans received a five-year, \$22.5 million deal.

The basketball analogy gets tossed around all the time these days when you're talking about wide receivers vs. corners. "I don't care how good of a little guy you are, they're going to throw over you," says Seahawks cornerback Shawn Springs (5-11, 200), the third overall pick in the '97 draft. "They are going to alley-oop. And if you're small, it's hard to go up and get it."

Says Evans: "When I played beside (5-9) Terrell Buckley in Green Bay, people just lined up away from me and went directly at him. They would throw jump balls, over and over. And in a one-on-one game, the shortest player is hardly ever going to jump the highest."

The Packers, Steelers and Chiefs have been among the most successful teams of the '90s.

For years, Rod Woodson dominated receivers with the Steelers. He is a rarity, a player with sprinter's speed in a 200-pound frame. Now Pittsburgh is trying to turn Chad Scott (6-1, 203), a first-round pick last year, into another Woodson. The Chiefs had two physical Pro Bowl cornerbacks last season in Dale Carter (6-1, 188) and James Hasty (6-0, 208).

JASON SEHORN

"He has told me that people have never heard his voice. The people he lines up against can talk to him all day, but they will never hear his voice. That shakes them up, because they can't get to Jason," his mother says slowly. "He really believes that the people who have power over you are the people who love you, not the people who hate you."

Irving Fryar wasn't the only one who began to notice Jason Sehorn in 1997. Nor was Fryar the only one who thought he knew all he needed to know about Sehorn.

"I didn't know he was white up until last year," says Fryar, the Eagles' wide receiver. "I thought he was a light-skinned brother."

As the Giants learned the new systems imported by coach Jim Fassel and defensive coordinator John Fox, as they embarked on a radical, turnabout season, Sehorn felt the walls crushing in on him. Everyone wanted a closer look. Not just the quarterbacks and receivers. Everyone wanted to know about the white cornerback with the new contract—an extension worth \$11.2 million through 2000—and whether he was worth it.

"I will never complain about the attention I got," Sehorn says. His face says otherwise. He shrugs. "But I started telling the reporters that, hey, can we just write about the fact that the guy can play. Not that he's white. I'm just out there with everybody else."

For a second, Sehorn seems weary, as if he's wondering if his legacy will ever be, *could* ever be, completely colorblind. "You are just watching the game and maybe if you look on the sidelines and I have my helmet off, you might go, 'Wow, it's a white guy.' But I don't want that

on the field. I don't want people to single me out for being white."

He pauses for another long, awkward moment.

"But I guess it works both ways," he says. "It's what makes me the player that I am."

Through the first few games of the '97 season, the Giants' new coaches also were wondering what kind of player Sehorn would make.

"When you first meet Jason, you look at him and say he must be a silver-spoon kid. But I'll tell you, the old adage about not judging a book by its cover really applies to him," Fox says. And, yes, Fox noticed that Sehorn was white.

"It's obvious that there aren't very many starting white corners. It does set him apart. You can't lie. But he's an exceptional player, I don't care what color he is," Fox says.

All season, Fassel saw Sehorn blow past the line, beat receivers to the ball, play one-on-one, blitz and read quarterbacks. The more he studied Sehorn, the more he came to a simple conclusion: Sehorn was as good as any athlete he ever had been around.

"Hey, you can be special, you can be known as one of the best corners in the game," Fassel said one day. He didn't tell Sehorn, but he could see Pro Bowls in Sehorn's future. So many trips to Hawaii, thought Fassel, that Sehorn would get sick of going. "See it in your mind," barked Fassel, wondering if it was sinking in. "Get the mental imagery."

Ronnie Lott also saw something from the TV studio; he saw Sehorn improving in infinite leaps. "He's a slasher, like a mixture between a

Fritz Shurmur, Green Bay's defensive coordinator, has developed some of the best and the biggest cornerbacks in recent years, including Evans, Craig Newsome (6-0, 190) and Tyrone Williams (5-11, 195). The Packers enter the '98 season with a streak of 35 consecutive quarters without allowing a touchdown pass.

Shurmur admits that his predisposition toward bigger players is in part a reaction to Buckley's lack of success in Green Bay. "Our game is a game of physical matchups," Shurmur says. "We're playing big receivers—Herman Moore, Cris Carter, Jake Reed—almost every week. If you defend those big guys with little guys, then usually you lose."

Of course, you don't have to be 6 feet or taller to play cornerback. Buckley has resurrected his career in Miami under Jimmy Johnson. The Redskins' 5-8 Darrell Green has thrived forever, in part because he has the speed of a thrill ride. The Cardinals' Aeneas Williams is a workaholic with great technique; even though he's only 5-10, few people catch anything on him. Those sorts of pass defenders were all the rage in the 1980s—the "Honey, I shrunk the cornerbacks" decade.

Cornerbacks used to be even bigger than they are now because they could whip up on receivers all over the field. Buccaneers coach Tony Dungy once played safety in Pittsburgh alongside cornerbacks

Mel Blount and J.T. Thomas. "These guys were around 6-2 and 215—they were huge," Dungy says. "And they would pop you. But then the rules changed."

In 1978, the NFL approved several rules in an attempt to open up the offense. One of them restricted defensive backs from having contact with receivers more than five yards beyond the line of scrimmage. Over the next few years, smaller receivers found a Smurfy niche. Defenses countered with cornerbacks such as Green. "Everyone had the 5-8, 175-pound corner who could fly," Dungy says. And some teams (such as the Buccaneers) have stayed with those sorts of corners, even as some of the best receivers have morphed into 6-2 athletes who can out-position a smaller defensive back for the ball.

The thing is, a good big corner is hard to find. That's why Heisman winner Charles Woodson (6-0, 198) was selected fourth overall by the Raiders in this year's draft. Everyone is looking for another Deion Sanders, or another Dale Carter or Doug Evans, or another Jason Sehorn (6-2, 210).

But the catch is that these big guys have to have a good motor. They don't necessarily have to play much run support—Sanders is an example of a big cornerback who isn't physical—but they have to cover one-on-one. "As a general rule, bigger is always better at cornerback," Colts president Bill Polian says. "Having said that, it's not better if it's not coupled with speed and cover ability."

Most NFL coaches and general managers want their cornerbacks to run no more than a 4.55 in the 40-yard dash—4.6 at the very outside. And smaller guys usually are speedier.

The Eagles' Bobby Taylor (6-3, 216) is one of the NFL's largest cornerbacks. In size, he isn't that far from some of the smallest linebackers. "Fifty percent of the wide receivers I go against are faster than I am in a footrace," Taylor says. "But those workout times are overrated. That's not really football speed."

Taylor and Evans, like many big corners, were safeties in college who made the conversion to cornerback in the NFL. And they have flourished, which is something to consider if you're a college safety angling toward the NFL.

"One thing about playing corner," Taylor says. "There's a lot more money in it."

TSN

Scott Fowler covers the NFL for the Charlotte Observer.



Sehorn is one of a number of 'big' cornerbacks who are necessary to play the aggressive style of defense that's in vogue these days in the NFL.

safety and a corner, like Rod Woodson," Lott says. "He can make things happen on a blitz. He knows how to disrupt timing routes. And he's calm. It's a great attribute to have as a defensive back. You can get too whacked out at the position, too worried about how you got burned last week."

After the season ended, Fassel retreated into his office and thought about the highlights of his first year. The Giants had won 10 games and the NFC East title. Fassel was named Coach of the Year.

And, as the season wound down, Sehorn had crested. He was named NFC Defensive Player of the Month in December, after he had to cover Fryar, the Redskins' Michael Westbrook and the Cowboys' Michael Irvin in successive games. Sehorn led the team in interceptions, with six, and there was one special one that Fassel dwelled on—maybe a measure of how people still don't understand the real Jason Sehorn.

It was against Cincinnati, and the Bengals were going for two points to tie it in the closing minutes. Jeff Blake tried to loft the ball over Sehorn's head. Sehorn vaulted and intercepted the pass.

"Why in the world," asked an incredulous Fassel, as he turned to Fox on the sideline, "are they trying to throw over Jason Sehorn's head?"

Whitney Sehorn was laughing. "What music does Jason listen to on game day? What gets him psyched up? Heavy metal? Country?" a friend had just asked her.

She laughed some more. In her mind, she screened Sehorn's pregame motivational tape: He was washing the dog. Grouping his shirts in his closet, according to color. Nothing over the top, nothing confrontational. Nothing to draw attention to himself.

And, of course, it's that way at the "Superstars" competition—and it's that way on the field. People have no idea who he is. He wears gloves and long sleeves—in part to protect his hands and arms, in part so that opponents and fans won't be looking for "the white guy playing cornerback."

This particular afternoon, in the Giants' locker room, he is carefully pressing a finger to the side of his nose. He had been playing on the Giants' charity basketball team and someone had rammed an elbow into his face. Like always, he showed no emotion.

"I don't want to be part of a circus. I don't want to be singled out. You know what I like to do? When we're warming up for our charity games, I throw the ball off the backboard. I dribble off my foot. I look like I can't play at all," says Sehorn, slowly laughing. "Then, you know what I do on the first play of the game? I call for the ball and I dunk."

"Once people see me play, it destroys all their expectations."

TSN

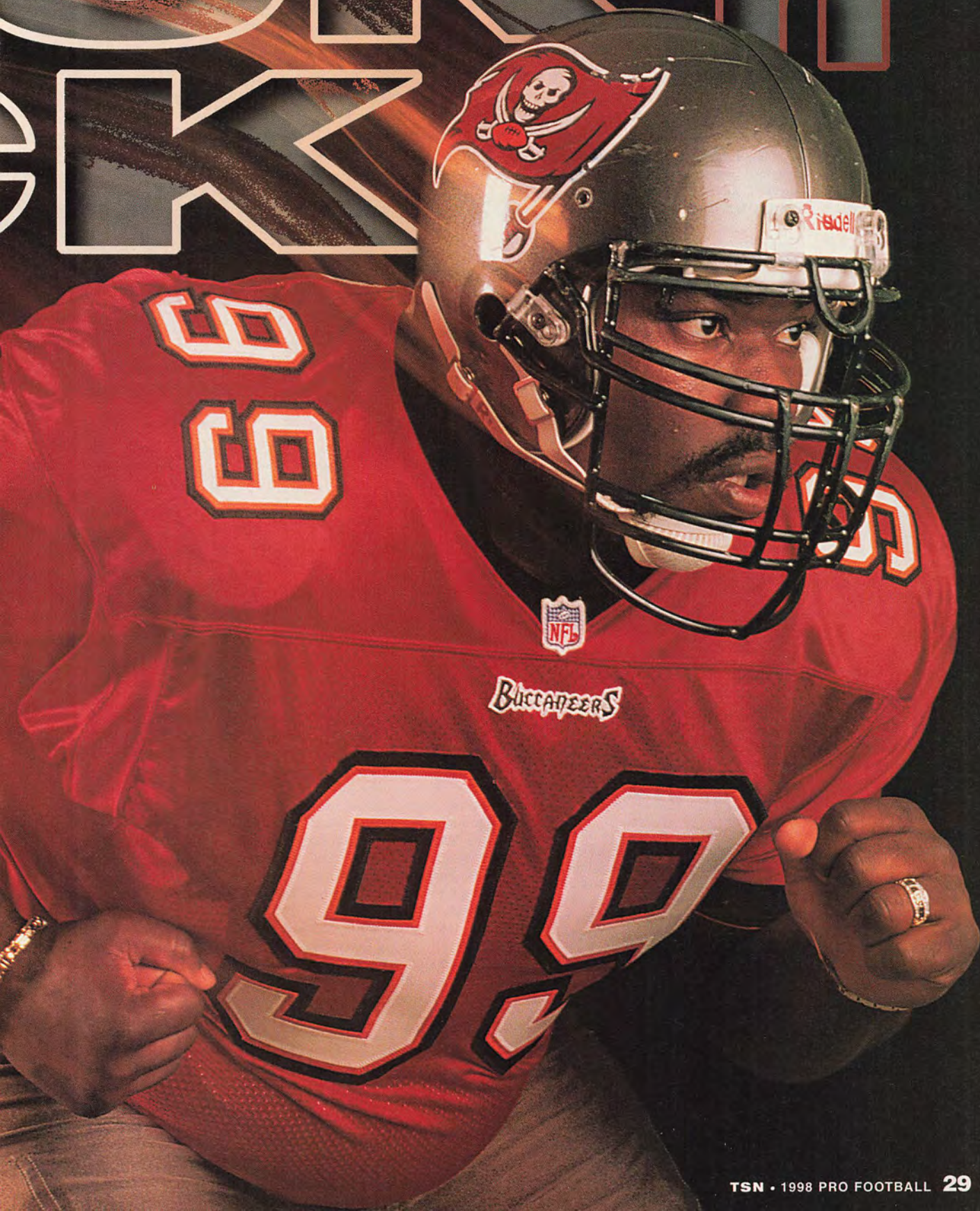
Bill Minutaglio, a writer for the Dallas Morning News, is a contributing writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.

SMA SACK ATTACK

Warren Sapp's mouth hasn't slowed a bit, and neither has his ferocity. But it appears the off-field troubles have—and it's all for his name's sake.

STORY BY MARTIN FENNELLY
PHOTOS BY ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

OK 'n'



DRIVING.

Warren Sapp is driving. On a sunny March day in Tampa, months after Young, Rice and Favre, all that fun and fury, he steers his blue Mercedes convertible down one of the city's main drags, looking for a place to feed himself. He stops at a red light. Yes, Warren Sapp stops.

A passenger one car over sees the big man, the very biggest in town. A double-wide mug with a helping of corn rows on top. Yeah, it's him. It's Sapp. The man cracks his door.

"Sapp!"

Sapp doesn't look at him.

"Sapp! Get 'em, Sapp!"

Green light. Gas.

Warren Sapp is talking, talking faster than he's driving, talking about not wanting to drive so fast anymore, even when ribbons of interstate dare him, even though speed itself, speed and power, are what he loves and how he makes his money, lots of it, playing football for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

"Got to be more careful," Sapp says.

Warren Sapp is talking about Mercedes. Not his car. His baby girl. She came into his and JaMiko's life in November. The world got simpler. When Sapp took Mercedes in his arms that first hour, he cried. Yes, Warren Sapp cries.

"That was me I was holding."

His blood. His name.

It's hard to get Mercedes away from her father these days, and that makes people who love Warren Sapp very happy. They see a maturation. They've wanted him to slow down just a little. When you're going too fast, you can end up in the wrong place, even by accident. Like 12th in an NFL draft instead of first. Like in a bad neighborhood, outside your car while the cops are inside, searching. It doesn't matter what you did or didn't do. Your name becomes a noose.

But all that was so far away in March. A week later, at the big news conference, Mercedes rode on her daddy's arm, to the left of his belly, as he stood and talked about his new deal. The Buccaneers, suddenly an A-list team in the NFL, had decided that Sapp, 25, was at the fore of the brave new order of defensive tackles, the league's new glamour position. The numbers were as hefty as the man himself: six years, \$36.05 million.

The dollars didn't even make Sapp blink. He held his girl. He held a Sapp. And knew the name was good.

"Your name is everything," he says.

TALKING.

Warren Sapp is talking. Get used to it. Actually, he's eating lunch, but he can do two things at once, especially when one of them is talking.

"I'm the most complete defensive tackle in this league—by far," Sapp says between fork loads of pasta. "Only person that has a game that can be put next to mine is (San Francisco's) Bryant Young. But I don't know."

Now he has gone and done it.

Or has he?

Warren Sapp is smiling. He just let one go, one of those quotes. The eyes dart, and the laugh comes from deep down, arriving full of mischief. You can't tell Sapp's story without that smile. He is funny and smart—and funny. Nothing in life gets past him. It was like this growing up. It was like this at the University of Miami. It was like this a couple of seasons ago, when Sapp wasn't even big yet—we mean truly big—and he was asked how the Bucs beat Washington one Sunday.

"We just opened a can of whup-ass on them."

Get ready, America, get ready.

For sacks. For smack.

Big Daddy Whup-Ass is here.

"He can take over a football game," Packers center Frank Winters says.

"What makes Warren so good is his strong will," Vikings coach Dennis Green says.

"I haven't been around a guy like him since Joe Greene," says Tampa Bay coach Tony Dungy, who played with Greene on the Steelers. "Warren has the physical tools, the mental capacity, the charisma, everything it takes to be a centerpiece."

Of a defense.

Of a champion.

Of a league?

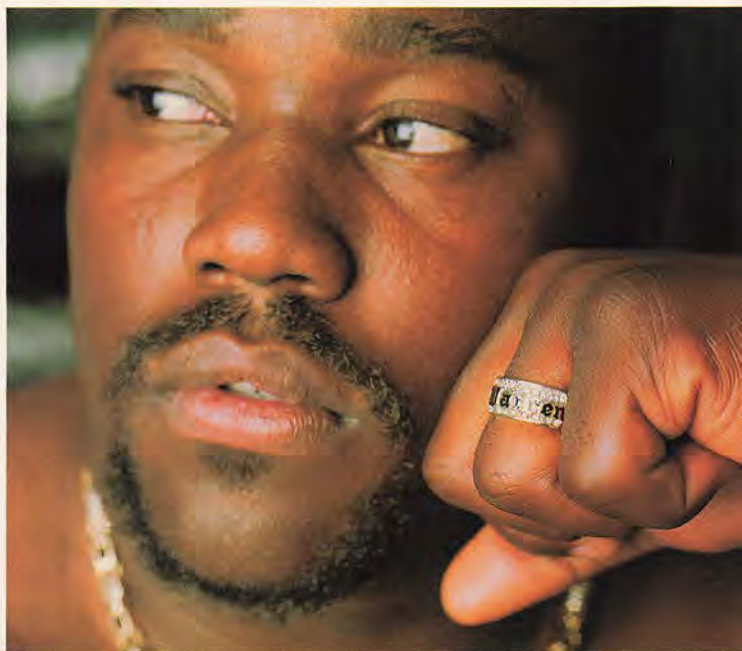
"Anything he wants," Dungy says. "Being known as the best is so important to Warren. It's so important that when they think of the best, they think of his name."

BOOKENDS.

Warren Sapp is talking about the bookends. That's the only way to describe the start and finish of Sapp's breakout season, his first and last word on 1997, a year that goes beyond his first Pro Bowl, beyond 10½ sacks, beyond double- and triple-teams defeated. You need that jolly ferocity. You need Sapp fearing no one, shaking the tree, changing the order. You need his game and gums flapping for a nation to see.

You need the bookends.

In the opener against San Francisco, Sapp personally destroyed the 49ers in a 13-6 upset that launched Tampa Bay's first playoff season in



15 years. He had 2½ sacks and tore down two future mainstays of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He sacked Steve Young, resulting in a Young concussion. Then Sapp ran down the greatest receiver in history.

Jerry Rice's name comes up. Sapp stops eating. Rice had his 1997 all but wiped out by a Sapp tackle. Sapp was flagged for a facemask on the play, though it appeared an accident. Rice didn't think so. He later said Sapp's tackle was dirty and that he was upset Sapp hadn't apologized.

Warren Sapp is talking. He says he asked Jerry Rice if he needed help right after the play, asked him again and again, but Rice just sat there. "He could have said something," Sapp says. "He doesn't even acknowledge me. Nobody walks on water."

Brett Favre's name comes up. "I love him," Sapp says of the Green Bay quarterback and three-time league MVP. "I think he appreciates the journey."

This is how Sapp showed his love for Favre last season, with taunts in a playoff game at Green Bay:

"I'm hunting your ass all day!"

"I'm not going anywhere!"

"Hey, pretty boy!"

Sapp had three sacks. But it was more than that. He made the Packers' house his turf. It was as if he had been invented for this exact moment. "I've never seen eyes so big," Bucs linebacker Derrick Brooks says. "He was so on it was almost scary."

Sapp and Favre warred all afternoon, then smiled as they lay on the ground. Sapp was on top.

"You gotta love it," Favre yelled.

"Damn right I do," Sapp growled.

Nevertheless, the Packers won. That day, Sapp hinted ever so slight-

ly that he and his dogs would be back. Big smile. The biggest.

"They're dead men the next time."

That's tall talk from someone who has to look up to see eye-to-eye with most of the people he punishes. The Big Dog isn't all that big by NFL standards. He carries his weight (listed at 276 pounds, but closer to 300) on a 6-2 frame, if that. None of him is chiseled. Sapp can look dough-boy soft.

He isn't.

There's a story about Sapp at the NFL scouting combine. A coach saw Sapp run the 40-yard sprint, then told the kid that he looked a little out of shape.

Sapp: "What was my time?"

Again.

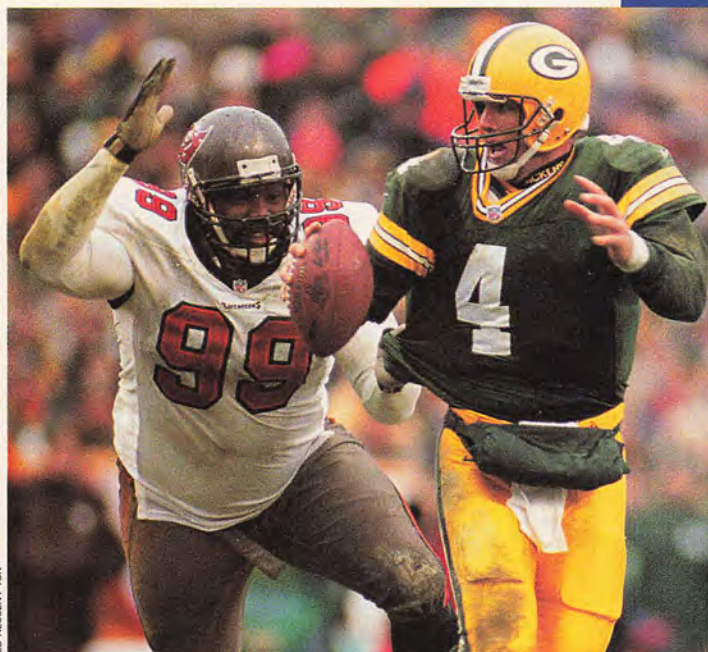
"What was my time?"

It was 4.85 seconds.

hulking blocker. To Sapp they're statues.

"Some of the greatest plays he makes you never hear about," Bucs defensive line coach Rod Marinelli says. "Last year, he was chasing Barry Sanders on a touchdown run. He didn't catch him, but it's a thing of beauty to see someone that big sprinting 70 yards. That's Warren. He loves to play. Hustling, chasing, all that heart, having so much fun. He's so alive."

ALIVE. Warren Sapp is so alive. He's eating his lunch and talking sports. He loves them all. Sapp is a regular at spring training baseball games and travels to Orlando for Magic basketball. He watches women's pro basketball. He watches Tour de France highlights. He knows his stuff and stores his trivia. The whole time, he's looking for one thing.



ED NESSEN / TSN

It was good.

"Warren's not a particularly avid weightlifter," Dungy says with a slight smile.

"He doesn't have one of those fast-twitch bodies like Johnny Randle," says Bucs general manager Rich McKay, referring to Minnesota's John Randle, Sapp's friend and fellow extremely rich defensive tackle.

"I'm not physically imposing," Sapp says with another laugh. "I kind of look like one of them security dudes: 'Can I see your pass? Got your credentials?'"

Sapp always has his. As if to confirm them, for the past two years he has won a competition for NFL linemen. It's held just before the Super Bowl, and tests agility, speed and strength. And sass. So much sass. Sapp doesn't even practice for the big show.

"They can't beat me," he says. "The first thing I do is size up the competition. Johnny is right there. But he's not quite as fast or as strong as me. And I can't let him beat me. I can't let him do something I can't do."

The rest of the field?

"I exclude all offensive linemen. Peace. You're out. Move to the right. All clowns to the right."

Warren Sapp is laughing.

Now he has done it.

Or has he?

He can lift his 300 pounds off the ground and reverse jam a basketball. He can hit a baseball a mile. And he can chase down smaller, allegedly quicker football players. The Bucs use a one-gap defensive scheme to emphasize Sapp's ability to dart down the line or past a

"A will to win."

He turns to basketball. Sapp stills plays at the Y. He says he doesn't quite get a guy like Magic guard Penny Hardaway. ("How do you play 16 games and make an All-Star Game?") But two letters make Sapp's tongue race: M and J.

The night before, Michael Jordan had put up like a million against the Knicks in New York, including one with his back to the basket. Ridiculous stuff. Pure Michael.

"Love him," Sapp says. "Love him. He has a fire in his belly. I like somebody who has a will and knows how to impose it on his opposition. You have to be strong."

Warren Sapp is thinking. He's thinking weak, thinking about someone like Lawrence Phillips, the troubled runner who has bounced from arrest to arrest, from problem to problem, from St. Louis to Miami. "Is he still in Miami?" Sapp asks. "Do we even know?"

Sapp and Phillips share a history. At the 1995 Orange Bowl, Sapp was with Miami, Phillips was with Nebraska, the game was for the national title. Nebraska won, but Sapp made a play people still talk about. While fighting off two Nebraska behemoths up front, Sapp reached out with his only free hand and pulled down the speeding Phillips by the back of his jersey collar. Phillips went horizontal. An amazing moment. One hand. Sapp says it was luck. He also says he'd like to do it again.

"I'd like to grab him and sit him down," Sapp says. "I wanted to talk to him so bad when he first came into the league. He was under a cloud and he was suffering a lot worse than I did. Now he misses this, misses that, misses meetings. I just want to tell him that your name

means something. When the games are over and you take off your shoes and your pads, all you have left is your name and your word."

NAME. Sapp can pinpoint the exact moment the clouds rolled in: April 22, 1995. "I'll always be synonymous with that day," he says. It was the first day of that year's NFL draft. It's still with him. That belly needs fire. It always needs fire.

Before April 22, there had been no ceiling. The name Sapp meant throwing blockers aside and quarterbacks to their doom and grabbing life by the throat. He won a Lombardi Trophy at Miami and left after his junior season. There were people who thought he was the best player coming out of college.

But in the days leading up to the draft, an NFL security report—leaked to the media—said Sapp, while at Miami, had tested positive for cocaine once and for marijuana six times.

Sapp denied the seven positives, though later admitted having tested positive for marijuana once his freshman season and then again at the NFL combine. But the damage was done. Sapp dropped on draft day, to the 12th pick, the first by Tampa Bay, which signed him to a four-year, \$4.4 million contract. Even so, one day cost Warren Sapp millions of dollars.

"You know what? It wasn't the money," he says. "The first five or six months I was still so damn angry. It's hard when you take pride in what's said about you. I admitted what I did. I'm a man. Hold me accountable for what I did, not what I didn't do. It wasn't money. It was, 'How do I get my name back?'"

Tampa Bay gave Sapp that chance. The Bucs had few reservations about him. The 1995 draft was the first overseen by McKay, who had become the team's general manager the previous November. He'd done his homework on Sapp, even visiting his home town of Plymouth, a small town about 20 miles northwest of Orlando.

That's where Annie Roberts raised five children, the youngest of whom never really knew his father. Warren Sapp mostly answered to his middle name: Carlos. He always answered to his mother, who sometimes worked three jobs a day, cooking and cleaning, taking home just enough for everyone to realize they had no money.

"But we were still rich," Sapp says. "We had love."

Annie taught her youngest what she taught the others. "I always wanted them to speak their mind," Annie says. "And they should stand up for what they believe in. Their name meant something."

Family legend echoes with the words of Sapp's maternal grandmother, Rosia Lykes, now 75. Once a very silly restaurant tried to charge Rosia \$3.79 for pancakes, just pancakes, nothing else. Rosia barked, "Ain't nobody going to rob me without no gun." Don't ever ask how Warren Sapp got to be Warren Sapp. Not ever again. Even as a baby, he was a Sapp.

"Carlos was always yapping," Annie says. "He'd be all over the house. We didn't use gates. Couldn't hold him. We'd just pile furniture in the door. But he'd get around or over it. Sooner or later, Carlos was going to get where he was going."

"We knew Warren Sapp," Rich McKay says.

Still, it was a difficult transition. Sapp went from being the man, the unquestioned man in Miami, to being the guy under the cloud. And he was a rookie on top of that. "Super Rookie," to be precise.

That was the derisive nickname Sapp says he was given by some of the established defensive linemen on the Bucs. Compounding the problem, Sapp says, was the coach. Sam Wyche benched Sapp at one point in his rookie season for subpar play. The two had their share of run-ins. "He was the worst," Sapp says. "The worst. Sam was the final nail in the coffin. He kept me down."

Things started to change when Dungy replaced Wyche after Sapp's first year. Upon becoming a head coach for the first time, the first thing the soft-spoken, deeply religious Dungy did was talk to Sapp. "No contradictions," Sapp says. "When I first met him, I was in awe of him."

Dungy's words burned like commandments in Sapp. "I told Warren he could be what this team needed," Dungy says. "I told him he could be what this organization needed and what this city needed."

And yet there always seems to be something in the way. Just enough trouble, or even the appearance of it, for Sapp to never quite

be free and clear, even when he should be. After a much improved second season, the draft began to fade. The clouds peeled away. Until June 1997.

That's when Tampa police searched Sapp's car for 45 minutes. In the backpack of one of Sapp's friends, officers allegedly found 12½ grams of marijuana, which Sapp's friend said was his. The case eventually was thrown out when a judge ruled that the search of Sapp's car had been unlawful. But, again, damage had been done.

Warren Sapp is talking.

"I was almost good. I was almost golden again. I'd had a good season. I was about to go."

Instead, he went to see Dungy.

"It's like going to see my mom," Sapp says. "Damn, having to go see him, it's just the worst feeling. You feel so bad."

Dungy asked what happened. Sapp told him. It was a big mistake. That was enough for the coach and for the people who care about Warren Sapp, who in turn rewarded their trust with his performance last season. Still, Dungy had gently sent a message. He still does.

"One of the great things about Warren is that he's never going to turn his back on his old friends," Dungy says. "He doesn't want anybody to think success has changed him. But he's not in the same situation as he was when he was younger. He has responsibilities. I think Warren knows that."

Warren Sapp lists them.

"My three ladies."

Sapp bought his mother a house before he bought himself one. Annie Roberts, who worked all those years, now lives near a golf course in Orlando, where she drives a charcoal gray Mercedes and mostly just feeds her fish. Carlos always wanted it that way.

And there's JaMiko. She's 22 and the sister-in-law of Alvin Harper, Sapp's former teammate. Still, she didn't know Sapp was a football player when she was given his phone number. They talked for hours, night after night. "We hooked up top before we ever met eye to eye," Sapp says. When Sapp pulled up in his Mercedes to take her on their first date, JaMiko thought he'd borrowed the car from a friend to impress her. It was never about football.

It still isn't. "He has so many sides," JaMiko says. "He can be so gentle and caring." They were married in a private ceremony under a gazebo on a Hawaiian beach at the '98 Pro Bowl. Among the guests were the seven other Bucs playing in the Pro Bowl; Brooks was Sapp's best man.

"Never seen Sapp so quiet," Brooks says. "I kept asking, 'You having fun? You enjoying this?' But I knew he was. This is so right for him."

So is Mercedes, or Mercy, as Annie likes to call her. "You can't describe the feeling," Sapp says. "Every day I wake up and I watch her grow and laugh."

LAUGHING. Warren Sapp is laughing. And people hear it.

"Having Mercedes has been huge for him," says his agent, Drew Rosenhaus. "If I'm driving too fast, he might tell me to slow down. ... He doesn't want to ride the wild edge."

Warren Sapp is driving and talking about winning a Super Bowl, him and his teammates beating the world, with the coach he loves up there on stage, holding that trophy. "It'll be sweet," Sapp says.

He's thinking about the stage, so naturally he's back talking about his little girl, about one problem with this perfect child, a problem Sapp fixed right off. Mercedes would be on the bed, playing and rolling over—until her mother brought out the video camera. Ready, aim ... nothing.

"Camera's on and she's stuck," Warren Sapp says. "Just lays there. I tell her, 'You ain't no Sapp! A camera's on and you're not performing! You ain't no Sapp!' Soon as I say that, she started. Can't stop her. Rolling and rolling. Laughing and laughing."

She's a Sapp.

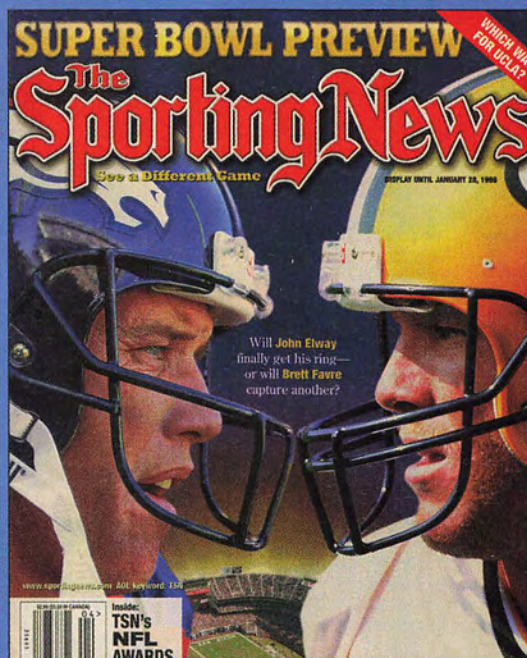
With a name to live up to.



STEVE NESIUS FOR TSN

Martin Fennelly is a columnist for the Tampa Tribune.

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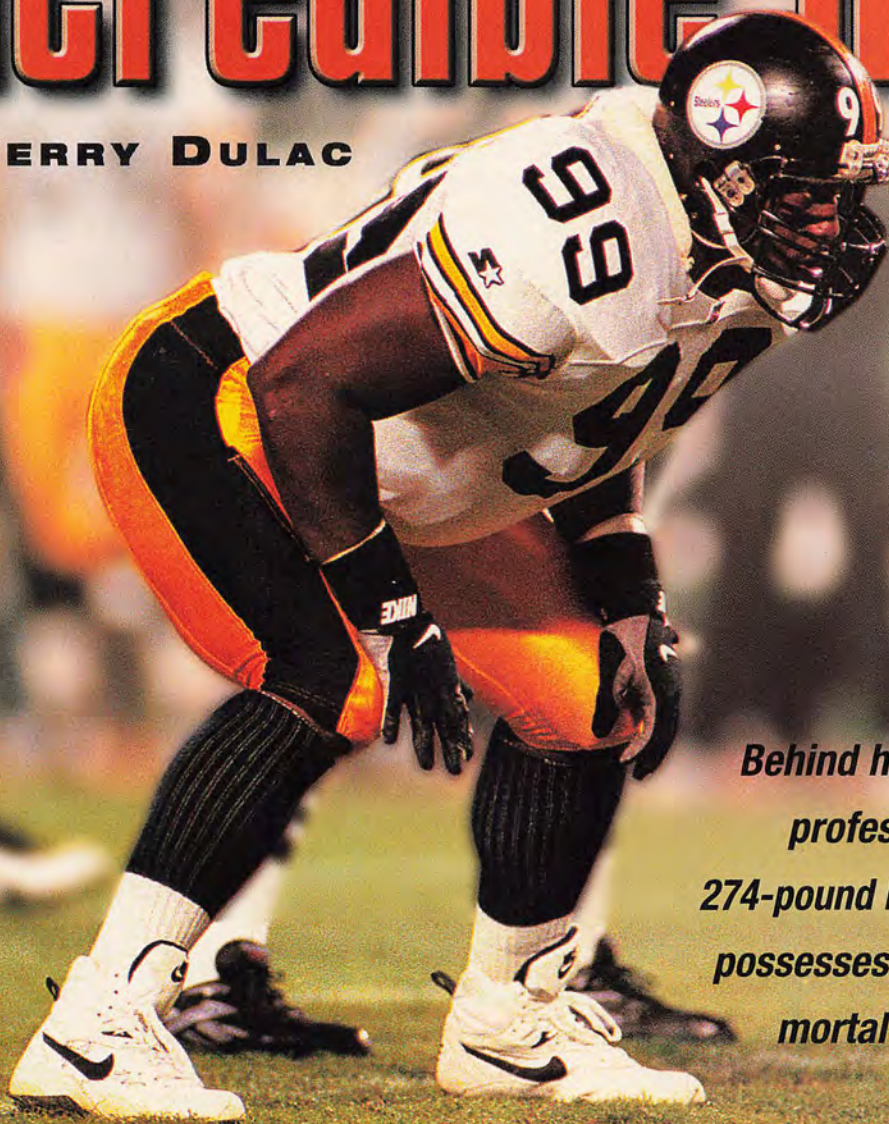
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The Incredible Hulk

BY GERRY DULAC



*Behind his glasses and professorial look, 274-pound **LEVON KIRKLAND** possesses powers beyond mortal linebackers*

Levon Kirkland, superhero comic book fanatic, would be pleased to know he is a real-life Clark Kent. Watch him, sitting there, on a plane or at his locker, wearing wire-rim glasses and looking almost professorial. He appears serious. Reserved. Responsible.

"If you look at me from a distance and did not know me—I'm wearing glasses and not smiling, I'm a big guy—people think I'm serious," Kirkland says in one of his pensive moods. "But the only time I'm serious is when I play football. I like to have fun."

Which Levon Kirkland do you want to see first?

The one who strips away the image, throws away the glasses and becomes the locker-room cutup? The person who can bring his teammates to tears with his impersonation of their jaw-jutting, spit-spraying, frothy-mouthed coach, Bill Cowher? The guy who spends his free time reading comic books or watching pro wrestling?

Or the one who lives in a 6-1, 274-pound body, looks like a cross between a nose tackle and a tree stump, and can run as though he's Jerome Bettis?

The Steelers call him their run-stopper—and with good reason. For most of the past two seasons, the team's rush defense has been at or near the top of the NFL (it finished third in 1996 and first in '97), despite losing players to free agency such as Kevin Greene, Ray Seals, Chad Brown and Rod Woodson.

But when the Steelers send their third-down "dime" package (six defensive backs) onto the field, they don't remove Kirkland. Rather, they position him in the middle of the field and ask him to cover the tight end or, depending on the responsibility, a running back. Two years ago, in a playoff game against the Colts, they had him cover running back Marshall Faulk. In last season's AFC championship game, his responsibility was Broncos running back Terrell Davis.

"He's a freak," says Tom Donahoe, the Steelers' director of football operations. "It's not like you look at the guy and say he's heavy or fat. He's big, thick and can run. Physically, he's awesome. To be that big and that fast and have the explosion he has ... he can just blow plays up."

Inside linebackers who weigh more than most defensive ends aren't supposed to drop into pass coverage. But Kirkland does. Inside line-

backers who weigh 274 aren't supposed to run downfield, with their backs to the quarterback, and make over-the-shoulder interceptions *a la* Willie Mays robbing Vic Wertz. But Kirkland does. Inside linebackers who play in the same conference with Junior Seau aren't supposed to start in the Pro Bowl. But Kirkland did.

Batman is his favorite comic-book character. But to the Steelers, Kirkland is Superman.

Take one look at Levon Kirkland—watch him engage a 300-pound-plus guard, rattle some running back's helmet, run downfield to cover a running back or tight end—and your first thought is, "Did anyone test his DNA?" It has taken six years, but the rest of the NFL is starting to discover what the Steelers already know: Kirkland is the best inside linebacker in the league—and he just might be the best linebacker, period. Certainly, he's the best linebacker that size.

"He adds so much from a personality standpoint to that defense," says Oilers general manager Floyd Reese, whose team faces Kirkland twice a season in the AFC Central. "I don't think I've ever seen anyone like him. ... We've seen some middle linebackers who are big, but I'm not sure we've seen ones as big as him who can run like him, who play from tackle to tackle, guard to guard."

Kirkland, 29, has evolved slowly to his status as the top linebacker on a team that includes Greg Lloyd, a five-time Pro Bowl selection, but it has had its rewards. He has been selected to the Pro Bowl each of the past two seasons and was voted a starter in 1997, ahead of Seau, who is used as the barometer for linebackers. During the offseason, the Steelers gave Kirkland a four-year contract extension that made him the highest-paid linebacker in NFL history (\$25.3 million over five years).

"In this league," Kirkland says, "it's more than just making tackles, because I can do that. But you have to make big plays."

Kirkland has done that since being drafted in the second round, out of Clemson, in 1992, Cowher's first year with the Steelers. Kirkland became a starter in 1993, when Hardy Nickerson left in free agency and David Little was cut, and he hasn't missed a game since. He led the team in tackles each of the past two seasons and produced nine sacks and six interceptions in that span.

The big plays started when Kirkland stuffed Patriots quarterback Drew Bledsoe on a goal-line sneak on the last play of a 17-14 victory in December 1993 and continued through Super Bowl 30 (after the '95 season), where he would have been the MVP if the Steelers had beaten the Cowboys. Since then, his play has remained at the same high standard. "If you watch him play," Cowher says, "you wouldn't realize he was that big until you ask one of those running backs when he hits them. He runs like a 230-pound backer, but he hits like a 260 guy."

On September 16, 1996, a Monday night, the Steelers were playing the Bills at Three Rivers Stadium in a nationally televised game. Kirkland was everywhere, making two tackles behind the line of scrimmage and intercepting two Jim Kelly passes. On one, he made an over-the-shoulder catch downfield that ABC replayed over and over. It was an unbelievable performance. And it wasn't even his best of the night.

Kirkland's best move may have occurred before the game, in the locker room, where he tried to loosen up his teammates and ease the tension by imitating Cowher. The previous week, All-Pro center Dermontti Dawson had suffered a knee injury. Kirkland took the opportunity to recreate the scene, playing the part of the Steelers' coach. Kirkland screamed in mock horror and pretended to rip an imaginary headset off as he raced across the locker room to Dawson's locker. Dawson was lying on the floor when Kirkland slid to his side. Kirkland grabbed Dawson's head, cradled it to his stomach and yelled, "Get a trainer! Get a trainer!" He looked at Dawson again and screamed, "Nooooooo, nooooooo!" Kirkland's teammates roared with laughter.

"I'm still a pretty big kid at heart," Kirkland says. "I think that keeps me going, keeps me loose. I just like silly stuff, to be honest with you."

On the field, though, he is all business. That night, following his Academy Award-winning portrayal of Cowher, Kirkland could have won an Oscar for his impersonation of a Pro Bowl safety. It came in the second quarter, when Kelly spotted tight end Lonnie Johnson open down the middle of the field. Realizing that the coverage had broken down, Kirkland ran after Johnson. He caught up to him just

in time. Running at full speed, Kirkland stretched out his arms, tipped the ball with his right hand, then cradled the interception as he tumbled to the turf.

"Do I remember it?" asks Bills G.M. John Butler. "Unfortunately, yes. 'Somebody who's that large and plays the way he can play, sideline to sideline, is unusual. I can't think of anyone that size who can play like that, and I've been trying to think back a while now. When you prepare to play an opponent, there are certain people you have to say, 'OK, we have to handle him,' and you can say that about Levon Kirkland. ... He's a helluva football player."

Inside linebackers are not the same as middle linebackers. They are not always cut out of the same mold as Dick Butkus and Ray Nitschke, middle linebackers of an earlier era, who primarily were run-stoppers. If they got an interception, most likely it was because the ball was tipped at the line of scrimmage or thrown right to them. But Kirkland is not your average inside linebacker.

"We'd tease Levon by calling him our 'run-stopper,'" says Dick LeBeau, the former Steelers defensive coordinator who now performs that role for the Bengals. "But when have you ever seen a run-stopper who could cover Marshall Faulk coming out of the backfield as a potential receiver? For 10 or 15 yards, he can stay with anyone. And his ability to cover a tight end, where you would normally need a safety, is what allowed us to do a lot of the things we did on defense."

That hasn't changed with Jim Haslett in charge of the Steelers' defense. Consider last season's AFC playoffs, when the Steelers were preparing for the Patriots, then the Broncos. Each team features one of the league's premier tight ends, Ben Coates and Shannon Sharpe. Wouldn't you have expected the Steelers to take Carnell Lake, their three-time Pro Bowl safety who had been switched to cornerback, and put him back at his natural position, thereby ensuring a favorable matchup with the two tight ends? Instead, the Steelers left Lake at corner and used Kirkland to help cover Coates and Sharpe. "I saw him do that a couple times last year, with some good tight ends, running stride for stride—at 275 pounds," Reese says.

It wasn't that long ago that Woodson, a cornerback on the NFL's 75th anniversary team, was the leader of the Steelers' defense. Then there was Lloyd, all chiseled and sculpted, biceps made from tungsten steel, who came to symbolize the defense. Lloyd used to wear a T-shirt that read: "I wasn't hired for my disposition." Truth is, he was. He brought an attitude, a demeanor that bordered between pit bull and kamikaze pilot, and he was the vociferous leader of a unit that came to be known as "Blitzburgh."

All that has changed—suddenly, dramatically and financially. It was no joke when Steelers president Dan Rooney summoned Kirkland to his office April 1 and told him he was rewarding him with the large contract. Kirkland, who was to make \$1.3 million in 1998, will receive a \$4.8 million signing bonus and a \$700,000 reporting bonus, bringing his total compensation for the season to \$6.8 million. Kirkland never expected such a staggering deal.

"I'm very happy, but it's sort of humbling," he says. "The only thing I wanted to do was play this game and play it well. I don't think I've ever been really concerned about other players. The only thing I've been concerned about is matching up to their level as far as playing. As far as money, everybody in the NFL makes pretty good money."

This is more than pretty good money—especially for a former second-round pick. Kirkland's average of \$5.06 million per year eclipses the previous top deal among linebackers, Seau's \$4.667 million annual deal with the Chargers. The deal points up the Steelers' increasing reliance on Kirkland and further illustrates how Rooney, despite losing an inordinate amount of players in free agency over the past three years, always manages to keep the team's core players.

"We feel he's been important for us, not only as a great player but as a great person," Rooney says. "That's why we really wanted to step up and get it done."

Kirkland is sitting on a stool in the Steelers' locker room, wearing his glasses, looking serious. "I've always been interested in how people develop, how this person gets these powers," he says, holding up a comic book.

The Steelers wonder the same thing about their superhero: Where did he get these powers? **TSN**

Gerry Dulac covers the Steelers for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

They Changed the Game

Pro football is a much different game than it was 50 years ago, thanks to this Fab Five

BY ALAN ROSS

On a larger landscape, their names reach like pantheonic towers to the sky: Edison, Ford, Pasteur, Salk, Bell—paragons of innovation whose contributions to life's overall quality we now take for granted in the age of Windows 98, pagers, global telecommunications, home-shopping networks and instant gratification.

On a grittier surface—the one of grass, chalk lines and goal posts—innovators as grand, bold and creative as Edison and Salk have left their own indelible imprints on the field of play throughout the evolving time line of pro football.

If you were to cut up the NFL's major phases of development like a German chocolate cake, you would slice it into two big pieces: The Emerging Embryo/George Halas-Led Days (from 1920 through World War II), and the Post-World War II/Paul Brown-Led Era.

Reflecting on pro football's early days is like talking about the development of man up until the Space Age—it was basically evolution at a snail's pace: We took millions of years to advance from crawling to walking. Then, in a heartbeat, we were on the moon. It's the same with pro football. Halas got us out of the cradle and up on our feet over a period of time that seemed like a millennium but actually was less than 30 years. The post-World War II era, spearheaded by the brilliant Brown, sent us into lunar orbit.

And that's where our story begins. THE SPORTING NEWS has chosen five men—four coaches and an administrator—who, more than any others, changed the face of pro football over the past 50 years. They were men of imagination, paragons of progress, not unlike Edison, Ford, Pasteur, Salk and Bell.

PAUL BROWN

No man in the past 50 years has revolutionized the game more than Paul Brown, the first coach of the Cleveland Browns. His almost manic dedication and near-genius ability to maneuver football players around a field has become legend, and as a planner, coach and executor, he was without peer. Bringing a combination of science and psychology to his job that was previously nonexistent, Brown's list of insightful innovations and far-reaching creations reads like the best of Jules Verne.

Brown was the first to institute intelligence testing of his players. Thus, the idea that a player with no brains off the field could suddenly become a genius on one was quickly and decisively buried forever.

Brown also made scouting a full-time, year-round profession, taking it out of the vague shroud of who is and who isn't a bona fide prospect, with its previous reliance on pre-generated sports publicity, and nudging it toward the science (albeit imperfect) that scouting is today. He also shares with another innovator, Sid Gillman, the credit for making film study a religion. Brown was the first to grade game film for the purposes of ongoing player evaluation. His approach to game preparation was a study in itself: He mandated that players carry a notebook, take notes, diagram plays and, above all, commit the contents to memory.

Most modern-day players wouldn't have a clue who to thank for an invention that has both enhanced and prolonged their million-dollar careers: the single-bar facemask. Though crude protective face gear was worn by some players as far back as the 1920s, the movement toward its popular acceptance is credited to Brown. It was spawned on the spur of the moment—at halftime of a game in which his star pupil, quarterback Otto Graham, had taken a face full of cleats in out-of-bounds action. Brown had good reason to sud-

denly get an attack of creativity. Graham, quite simply, was irreplaceable. Graham reemerged for the second half with the new protective bar and the rest, to every player's eternal thanks, is history.

"Paul Brown was just light years ahead of everybody," Graham once said. "I'm grateful I got to play under him. I learned an awful lot about football, organization and life. He's one of the truly great coaches the game has ever known. He has done more for pro football than any coach I know."

There was more. Ever wonder where the term "taxi squad" came from? Back in those formative years in Cleveland, Brown used to keep near-Browns-caliber players close at hand by securing jobs for them with team owner Mickey McBride's taxi company. Yet another Paul Brown innovation was the two-minute drill, the standard closing for practically every game played over the past five decades.

Brown also concocted the famous "messenger guards" system. The free-substitution rule change in 1950 allowed Brown to ferry in his hand-picked plays to Graham, using the guards as alternating transports. It perfectly suited

Brown's "my way or the highway" brand of control. No detail escaped his withering scrutiny, but few could argue with the results: The Browns won seven league championships in his first 10 seasons as their coach. Later, the messenger guards came to signify Brown's intransigent posture toward an ever-changing frontier.

For all his tireless application of principles and mental muscle power, Brown, who died at age 82 in 1991, may well have been a fatalist at heart. "You make all sorts of plans," he once said, "but sooner or later in any close game the unexpected always happens. You fool somebody, or they fool you, and that's the ballgame. Football would be awful dull if things turned out any other way."



Celebrations became old hat for Brown, whose teams won seven titles in his first 10 seasons as coach.

SID GILLMAN

Like Brown, Gillman is another turn-of-the-half-century coach. He is regarded as a brilliant passing-game innovator, but his overall expertise as an organizer, scout and drafter indicates he had talent in many areas.

After several stops on the college trail as an assistant, Gillman was the surprise choice of owner Dan Reeves to become coach of the Los Angeles Rams in 1955. He took the team to the Western Conference title in his first year, and his passing attack, featuring Norm Van Brocklin, Tom Fears and Elroy "Crazylegs" Hirsch, was the most talked about and imitated in the NFL. But four disappointing years followed, three of them with a young Pete Rozelle as club general manager, and at the end of the '59 season Gillman and his entire staff resigned.

The following year, he became coach and general manager of the Los Angeles Chargers of the fledgling AFL. There, his myriad abilities manifested quickly, as league foes struggled just to keep up with him. Gillman's teams won the Western Division title five out of the franchise's first six years in existence. One of those seasons—1963—the Chargers, then in their third year in San Diego, were AFL champions.

The long pass was at the core of the Gillman game. Bombs away, first. "If you go long right away," Gillman said, "you've put the fear of God into them and probably opened up some other things." Play-action passing was crucial. Eyeing even the slightest overreaction by the defense like a hawk, Gillman was ready to pounce: "That's where

the big play comes in. And big plays are what win football games. ... I don't want the little play, the average play. I want the big play. Hell, I'm not going to stay up all night trying to figure out how to gain three yards."

Former NFL quarterback Ron Jaworski appreciates Gillman's contributions to his craft. "Sid Gillman's a genius," he said. "He knows more about the passing game than any man alive. He's an offensive genius."

Gillman introduced "rule blocking" into the NFL and is also credited, along with Brown, with developing film study as an art. Is it saying something about a man's dedication—or his depravation—when you hear that he managed to scrape together \$35 for his honeymoon, then spent half of it on a movie projector so he could watch game film? Gillman, of course, provided the obvious answer:

"You know what football is to me? It's blood."



If it came to pass, the offensive-minded Gillman was happy.

TOM LANDRY

"It is easy for me to point to the one man whose coaching played the biggest role in shaping both my football strategy and the kind of coach I became," Tom Landry once said. "That man was Paul Brown."

For Landry, a man revered for his creative approach to defense, it all began as a Brown "lesson" at Landry's expense.

On the afternoon of November 20, 1949, as a rookie defensive back for the New York Yankees of the old All-America Football Conference, Landry was "targeted" by Brown and Cleveland receiver Mac Speedie, who that afternoon set AAFC records for receptions (11) and yards (228) in a single game. It was the darkest hour of Landry's seven-year pro career, but he learned something of critical importance, something so profound that it would form the foundation of his philosophical approach to coaching: He realized his limitations. Anything Landry achieved from then on would have to be attained through diligent preparation and knowledge.

By 1955, his last year as a player with the New York Giants, Landry was deciphering the intricacies of then-coach Steve Owen's new 6-1-4 "Umbrella" defense. The next year, his first as a full-time Giants assistant, Landry unveiled his revolutionary prototype—the famous 4-3. It would become the bedrock NFL defense through



Landry's stoic demeanor masked an innate ability to tinker with—and come up with new—formations.

the mid-1970s and pro football's best-ever workaday defense.

But what elevated Landry to near-deity status among his peers was his determination to out-create his creation. Never previously considered a genius on the other side of the ball, Landry began to devise an elaborate scheme to *attack* his 4-3. What resulted was the most complex offensive system to date: the Dallas Cowboys' famed multiple-set offense.

Landry didn't stop there. Next he went back to tinkering with his 4-3, which yielded the "Flex" and, ultimately, the deadly Doomsday Defense. It helped

the Cowboys put together an unprecedented streak of 20 consecutive winning seasons from 1966-85.

"If I had to pick my greatest strength, I'd say it was innovation," Landry has said. "A successful leader has to be innovative. If you're not one step ahead of the crowd, you'll soon be a step behind everyone else."

Landry's players rarely saw him in that position. "I thought I knew a little about football," former Cowboys quarterback Don Meredith once said. "But Landry would be up at the blackboard saying, 'OK, we'll do this ... then they'll do that.' You'd interrupt him and say, 'Coach, what if they don't do that?' Landry would just look at you and say, 'They will.'"

EARLY-DAY INNOVATORS

These men deserve recognition for the contributions they made in the pre-World War II era:

• **GEORGE HALAS.** The Patriarch of Pro Football. No man is more responsible for shaping the game as we know it, from play on the field to the rules that govern it. The most visible of the original league founders in 1920, Halas started up his young Chicago Bears (*nee* Decatur Staleys) as both player and coach.



'Papa Bear's' contributions to the league were monumental, not the least of which was helping to create it.

In 1932, as chairman of the league's newly formed rules committee, Halas sponsored two memorable contributions to the game. Beginning with the 1933 season, forward passing was allowed anywhere behind the line of scrimmage. Previously, the passer had to be at least five yards back. That same year, inbounds hash marks were established 10 yards from either side-

line, which, in effect, gave the offense an extra down. Invariably, one down had been wasted just getting the ball into decent position after an out-of-bounds play.

Halas held on for dear life through the Depression before popularizing, with the invaluable aid of his staff, the resurgence of the T-formation in the late 1930s. Five decades into his storied career, Halas was still at it, winning his sixth NFL title in 1963.

• **RED GRANGE.** In 1925, Halas' signing of the "Galloping Ghost" brought instant respect to a struggling NFL that was viewed at the time as a second-rate bastard-child to college football. Grange, who had been the college game's biggest star at Illinois, became the immediate drawing card the infant league needed. His marathon cross-country barnstorming tour with the Bears—eight games in 12 days (17 games between Thanksgiving and late January)—created hundreds of thousands of new fans.

• **CLARK SHAUGHNESSY.** The diligent and brilliant Shaughnessy, in his capacity as an unofficial adviser with the Bears during the 1930s, is most credited with coming up with the modern improvements of Halas' rejuvenated T-formation. In addition, his "language," on everything from positions to formations to alignments, systemized communication between coaches and players.

• **DON HUTSON.** The Packers' star (1935-45) brought a new dimension to receiving previously unseen. Hutson's superior ability and speed caused defenses to double- and even triple-cover him—a procedure foreign at the time. Although 53 years have passed since he last played, Hutson still owns several important NFL career receiving records, including most seasons leading the league in receptions (eight), yards (seven) and touchdowns (nine). This from an era when teams threw an average of 10 to 12 passes per game.

• **SAMMY BAUGH.** The greatest triple-threat back in NFL history, "Slingin' Sam" staggered pro football with his wide-open-spaces approach to the aerial game. Beginning in 1937, his rookie year, he passed the Washington Redskins to the NFL title by filling the air with footballs from any point on the field at any time. With calm execution, he passed on fourth down from his end zone for a 42-yard completion in the '37 championship game. An excellent punter as well, Baugh still holds the record for highest career average (45.1).

TSN
—ALAN ROSS



LAMBEAU

FIELD

on the field

— **GREAT SITES** —

on the net

www.sportingnews.com

AOL keyword: TSN

FIVE MAJOR INNOVATIONS

We've heard about the men who've made a difference, but what about the innovations that have most affected pro football? Here are five that have seriously altered the sport over the past 50 years:

- **FREE SUBSTITUTION.** In 1950, pro football breathed. A rule permitting free substitution was permanently passed (it had been experimented with from 1943-45, when the league's ranks were thinned by war). In effect, the day of the great two-way player was dead. With platooning, specialists now emerged

"put skirts on quarterbacks" would have an Otto Graham or a Sammy Baugh laughing. The infamous 1991 "in the grasp" rule for the preservation of endangered quarterbacks was the most visible of a set of offensive-friendly changes that further opened up the game.

- **THE SAFETY BLITZ.** On September 17, 1961, in a game against New York, St. Louis Cardinals free safety Larry Wilson blindsided Giants quarterback Charlie Conerly. It wasn't so much "The Hit Heard 'Round the NFL" as it was the way in which the

hit was executed. At that precise moment, the safety blitz came into creation, the brainchild of Cardinals assistants Chuck Drulis and Ray Willsey. Wilson went on to a Hall of Fame career, and offensive-blocking schemes haven't rested a day since.

- **ASTROTURF AND DOMED STADIUMS.** Football on a rug. It may be nirvana for corporate executives, sky-box owners and aisle vendors, but it took the fun out of football for those



Houston's Astrodome, the so-called '8th Wonder of the World,' ushered in the start of indoor football.

on offense and defense.

- **THE 4-3-4.** The 5-2-4 "Eagle" was the NFL's *de rigueur* defense throughout the 1940s. Giants coach Steve Owen then devised the 6-1-4 "Umbrella" that stalled (temporarily) the dynastic Cleveland Browns juggernaut in 1950. Subsequent tinkering by Giants assistant Tom Landry brought the 4-3-4 into play later in the decade. It ushered in the player who would become the most celebrated star on the other side of the ball—the middle linebacker.

- **"IN THE GRASP" AND OTHER OFFENSIVE-FRIENDLY RULE CHANGES.** A long time has passed since the days of the not-so-discreet \$10 quarterback bounties encouraged by the Eagles' staff in the late '40s and numbing events such as Bears defensive end Ed Meadows' lights-out annihilation of Lions quarterback Bobby Layne in 1956. Nowadays, rule changes that have

fans who prided themselves on the enduring challenge of cold, inclement weather. AstroTurf kicked up knee injuries instead of loose dirt and unearthed a new foot ailment: turf toe.

Domed stadiums date to 1965, when Houston opened its towering shrine to AstroTurf—the Astrodome. Ten more years passed before enclosed-synthetic proliferation continued, this time in New Orleans (the Superdome) and in Pontiac, Mich., with the Silverdome. Later, Seattle, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, Atlanta and St. Louis would fall.

Cowboys general manager Tex Schramm once conducted a tour of Texas Stadium for players' wives. When one of them mentioned aloud how hard the artificial surface felt, Schramm reportedly replied, "It only feels that way when you walk on it."

TSN

—ALAN ROSS

BILL WALSH

"I was fortunate in my years as an assistant coach," Bill Walsh said, "to work under some men who were forward-thinking and who nurtured my creative impulses. One of those I'm referring to is Paul Brown."

There's that Brown connection again. For eight years (1968-75), Walsh sat at the feet of the master, heading up quarterbacks and receivers for the Bengals' new franchise in Cincinnati. Walsh's endeavors at blueprinting offensive passing schemes did *not* begin in San Francisco.

"I remember how it started," Walsh said. "Paul Brown came to me and said we needed more motion in the offense. I put in more man-in-motion plays that served to put more receivers in the pass pattern, which, in turn, gave us more options. It was a domino effect. Soon we had the top-ranked offense in football. And it all stemmed from the boss deciding to try something new."

Walsh was hired in January 1979 to rebuild the 49ers, and his famous "West Coast offense" was soon coined. It was a throwback

to the passing game of Brown's heyday in Cleveland, which placed paramount importance on pinpoint precision and flawless timing by receivers and quarterbacks. In Joe Montana, Jerry Rice, Roger Craig, John Taylor, et al., Walsh had the personnel to carry out his short-game passing attack. The Niners ruled the 1980s, winning four Super Bowls.

"You have to be committed enough to your ideas to stick it out," Walsh said. "The worst thing you can do is kill an idea before it has a chance to develop."

Walsh, renowned for his creativity, organization and teaching, now has the wisdom of the ages behind him. At 66, he readily acknowledges that pro football's great wheel is rarely reinvented. "There *are* new ideas that come up," he once said, "but most often you would have seen them at some point in the history of football."



Walsh

PETE ROZELLE

A peerless leader who elevated pro football to worship status in contemporary American life, Rozelle took over the NFL's reins in 1960 as a precocious 33-year-old former G.M. of the Los Angeles Rams. In 1959, his third year with L.A., he engineered an historic trade of nine Rams to the Chicago Cardinals for future Hall of Fame running back Ollie Matson. After succeeding Bert Bell as league commissioner the next year, more history quickly ensued.

As NFL commissioner from 1960-89, Rozelle continually received laurels for his contributions to the development of pro football, which overtook baseball as the nation's No. 1 spectator sport during his reign. It was Rozelle who negotiated the first mega-million-dollar TV contracts; it was he who helped to establish the Super Bowl in 1966; it was he who orchestrated, in part, the merger of the AFL and NFL in 1970. The creation of the league's highly successful mer-



Rozelle's vision helped make Sunday a day that belongs to the NFL.

chandising arm, NFL Properties, also occurred on his watch. "What we enjoy every Sunday can be attributed to Pete's vision and talents," Browns/Ravens owner Art Modell said.

The AFL-NFL merger was an epic war, its sea of undercurrents and skirmishes making it a classic in the history of labor relations. Rozelle had his well-publicized riffs with some of pro football's rebels along the way, the Oakland Raiders' Al Davis most prominent among them, but he got the job done.

Ironically, it was a bitter, threat-of-litigation stand by one team owner that helped swing the majority vote that ultimately brought the merger of the two rival leagues into its final form.

And which owner was that?

None other than Cincinnati's Paul Brown.

TSN

Alan Ross is a writer based in Monteagle, Tenn.

PIONEERING PLAYERS

These five players have made indelible impressions in the post-World War II era:

• **BILL GEORGE.** Who was the first middle linebacker? No one can say with certainty, but two years before Tom Landry officially broke in his 4-3 defense with the Giants, the Bears' George, then a middle guard, made some spontaneous adjustments in a 1954 game against Philadelphia and began dropping back off the line in passing situations. But you can't spotlight one without saluting the others: Joe Schmidt, Sam Huff, Les Richter. All share credit for developing the position.

• **PETE GOGOLAK.** The "sidewinding" kicker of the 1964 Buffalo Bills and, later, the New York Giants, the Hungarian-born Gogolak had kicked a soccer ball since age three. When he first saw the great Lou Groza kicking on TV, Gogolak thought *that* was a goofy way to kick. Gogolak's soccer-style technique eventually became the game's standard, and straight-on kickers have since vanished from the league.

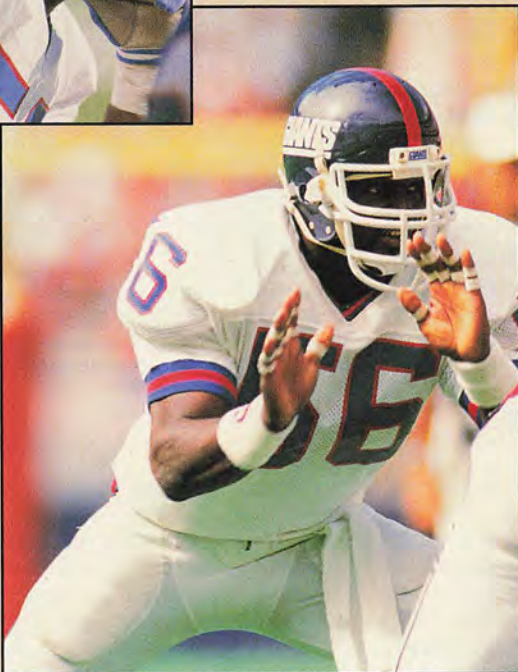
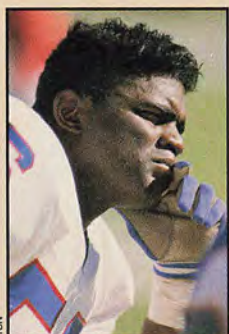
• **JOE NAMATH.** There had been plenty of stars in the NFL before him, but it took "Broadway Joe" to bring celebrity to the sport. Best remembered for taking his Jets to a "guaranteed" win in Super Bowl III, Namath's most enduring contribution may be the instant legitimacy that he brought to a young AFL when he signed an unprecedented \$437,000 contract to play in the world's No. 1 market in 1965.

• **FRAN TARKENTON.** "The Scrambler" ran more in circles than in straight lines, rearranging defenses and opponents' minds in the process. In his first game for the expansion Minnesota Vikings on September 17, 1961, he stunned the Chicago Bears in a 37-13 upset with his unplanned roaming sorties. Tarkenton retired in 1978 with more than 50,000 combined yards passing and running, the first player to reach that plateau.

• **LAWRENCE TAYLOR.** There had been plenty of top-grade blitz/contain/cover-type outside linebackers before Taylor, but "LT" redefined the position with his uncommon speed, size and terror-invoking presence. No read-and-react player, Taylor was a mad-dog aggressor on the hunt. Anything that moved with a football was his immediate prey.

TSN

—ALAN ROSS



Taylor forever changed the way outside linebackers would play with his attacking style and great speed.

SCOUTING THE AFC

This finally may be the year the Chiefs reach the Super Bowl

BY DAN POMPEI

If they could find a way to play the Super Bowl before the end of the regular season, the Chiefs really would be a cinch to get there. And even though they will have to win at least two postseason games to reach the Super Bowl, the Chiefs still look like a pretty good bet to get there.

Their 13-3 record last year tied the 49ers and Packers for best in the NFL. Among their victories were a win over the Broncos, another over the Steelers and a rout of the 49ers.

The Chiefs were a great team last year ... until the playoffs. Then, they lost to the Broncos at home in their first game to continue a disturbing trend. Since Marty Schottenheimer has been coaching the Chiefs, they have lost their first playoff game five times. As successful as Schottenheimer has been, he hasn't been to a Super Bowl.

But this could be the year. Here are six reasons to believe the Chiefs can win in the postseason this year:

- Their offense should be less prone to going haywire with new offensive coordinator Jimmy Raye, who replaced Paul Hackett. Offensive confusion was one of the Chiefs' problems in their playoff loss to the Broncos. Raye has talked about opening up the offense; he's even installing the shotgun.

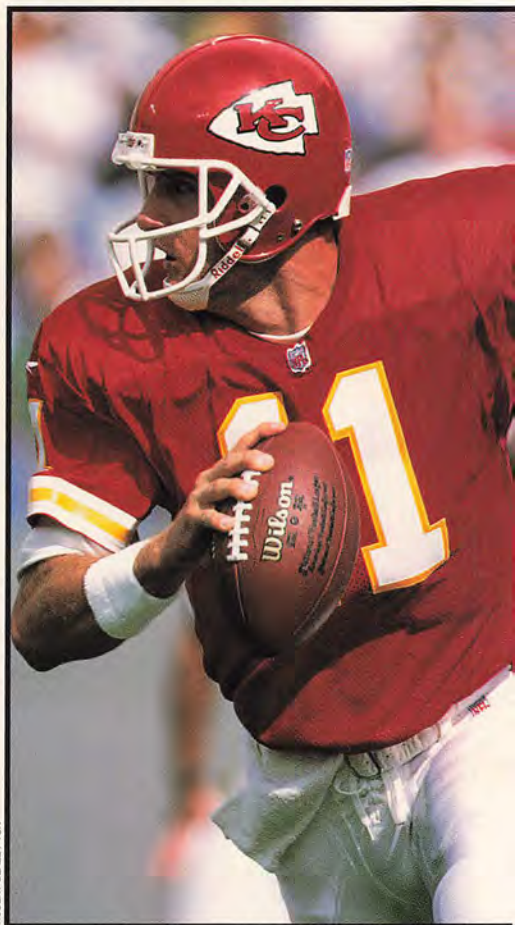
- Quarterback Elvis Grbac should be more comfortable in his second year with the team. He performed remarkably well last season after coming over from the 49ers, and he can play better than that this year.

- They run the ball better than most teams. The Chiefs may have lost Marcus Allen (and decided not to re-sign Greg Hill), but the reason they always run well isn't their running backs. It's their offensive line, in particular the interior of guards Dave Szott and Will Shields and center Tim Grunhard.

- They have added a receiver who can prevent Andre Rison from being consistently double-teamed. Derrick Alexander may not have the best hands in the world, but he is a definite upgrade over the players who were in his spot last year.

- The pass rush should be improved. Adding Chester McGlockton and Leslie O'Neal will be great moves if Schottenheimer and defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham can keep fires lit under their butts.

- They have a number of good, young players who could be better in January than they are in September. Among them are tight end Tony Gonzalez, left tackle Victor Riley, middle linebacker Donnie Edwards, outside linebacker Anthony Davis, strong safety Reggie Tongue and free safety Jerome Woods.



Grbac should be more comfortable in his second season as a Chief. He also should benefit from new offensive coordinator Jimmy Raye's promise to open up the attack.

AFC EAST

PLAYER TO WATCH: Jets RB Curtis Martin. The Jets gave up first- and third-round picks for Martin, so it's obvious Bill Parcells believes Martin is one of the game's elite backs. But Martin hasn't really proved he is more than a good back. His career average per carry is 3.97 yards, and he broke down at the end of last season with shoulder and groin injuries. What's more, in New York he will be the focal point of defenses; he wasn't the focal point in New England. With Glenn Foley likely to be his quarterback, Martin may miss Drew Bledsoe more than he realizes.

NOTES: Jimmy Johnson's goal since

becoming coach of the Dolphins has been to establish the running game. Going into his third year, Johnson still doesn't have the type of personnel he needs to field one of the league's premier ground games. **Karim Abdul-Jabbar** or **Lawrence Phillips** will be Johnson's primary tailback, with first-round pick **John Avery** inserted in nickel situations. Johnson did improve the line by signing guard **Kevin Donnalley**. ... The Patriots won the division last year without running back **Curtis Martin**, who missed the final three regular-season games with injuries. They'll try to do it again this year after

letting him sign with the Jets. Taking Martin's place likely will be first-round pick **Robert Edwards**. The Patriots' offense also will be different because it has its third coordinator in as many years; the new guy is **Ernie Zampese**, formerly of the Cowboys. ... The cord to the Bills' Super Bowl era was further cut with the resignation of coach **Marv Levy**. His defensive coordinator, **Wade Phillips**, was promoted to coach, and he will be counting on many of the players who helped Levy win all those games, guys such as **Bruce Smith**, **Andre Reed** and **Thurman Thomas**. But if the Bills are to

rise again, it will be as a result of the performance of newly acquired quarterback **Rob Johnson** and young players such as **Antowain Smith** and **Gabe Northern**. ... The Jets enjoyed a rebirth under **Bill Parcells** last season, barely missing the playoffs. Parcells' rebuilding plan continued in the offseason, as he dumped **Hugh Douglas**, **Jeff Graham**, **Lorenzo Neal** and **Adrian Murrell**. And Parcells seems set to go with untested **Glenn Foley** as his starting quarterback The Colts were a better team than their record indicated last year but were decimated by injuries. But this year, they might have to take a step backward before they can progress. They have a new coach in **Jim Mora**, a new quarterback in rookie **Peyton Manning** and a new playbook. Overcoming all the newness could be quite a task.

AFC CENTRAL

PLAYER TO WATCH: Ravens QB Jim Harbaugh. Being reunited with Ted Marchibroda and playing behind a stout line could revitalize Harbaugh's career. Harbaugh played poorly after losing confidence last season, but he came on strong at the end of the season. Harbaugh has a flair for the dramatic, and it should be evident now that he will be throwing to Michael Jackson and Jermaine Lewis.

NOTES: The story in Pittsburgh is the same from year to year—lose valuable members of the team, replace them with rising young stars. This year, the ones to replace are left tackle **John Jackson** (**Justin Strzelczyk** is moving over from right tackle and **Jamain Stephens** and **Paul Wiggins** will battle for the right tackle spot), receiver **Yancey Thigpen** (**Will Blackwell** will battle for the job with **Courtney Hawkins**) and offensive coordinator **Chan Gailey** (**Ray Sherman** was hired from the Vikings). ... The Jaguars hope they improved their pass rush by adding linebacker **Bryce Paup** and subtracting defensive end **Clyde Simmons**, and they hope they improved their running game by adding rookie running back **Fred Taylor** and subtracting **Natrone Means**. Having quarterback **Mark Brunell** healthy for the whole season could improve the Jaguars more than anything. ... The Oilers determined that the development of quarterback **Steve McNair** would be enhanced if he had better receivers, so they signed the best receiver in free agency in **Yancey Thigpen** and drafted the highest-rated receiver on their board in **Kevin Dyson**. In addition, they brought in free-agent tight end **Jackie Harris**. ... The Ravens took some chances on some players who had worn out welcomes elsewhere. They traded for **Jim Harbaugh** and running back **Errict Rhett** after their teams deemed them expendable. They also signed free-agent fullback **Roosevelt Potts** and cornerback **Rod Woodson**, both of whom were considered risky by some. ... Defensive lineman **Dan "Big Daddy" Wilkinson** took more from than

he gave to the Bengals, so they weren't sorry to see him go to the Redskins. The thinking is free-agent pickups **Clyde Simmons** and **Michael Bankston** should more than make up for the loss of Wilkinson. Improved play at linebacker also could be a factor. The Bengals have spent three first-round picks on linebackers—**Reinard Wilson**, **Takeo Spikes** and **Brian Simmons**—in the past two years, and linebacker soon should be the strength of this team.

AFC WEST

PLAYER TO WATCH: Chiefs DL Chester McGlockton. Especially when the opponent is the Raiders. The excuse given for McGlockton's inconsistent efforts was that he was unhappy in Oakland. Well, he's not unhappy anymore. He got the contract he wanted and he gets to play for the team of his choice. Chiefs coaches believe they can get more out of McGlockton than the Raiders did because defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham had success with McGlockton when he was in Oakland. We shall see.

NOTES: The Chiefs' running game was a strength last year and could be again this year despite the loss of **Marcus Allen** and the decision not to re-sign **Greg Hill**. Among those used in the running back-by-committee approach could be Pro Bowl fullback **Kimble Anders**, converted fullback **Donnell Bennett**, former practice-squad player **Jesse Haynes** and draft pick **Rashaan Shehee**. ... One of the great secrets about the Broncos—at least until the Super Bowl, anyway—was the effectiveness of their undersized offensive line. Whether the line can play as well as last year depends on how **David Diaz-Infante** plays at guard in place of **Brian Habib**, who signed with the Seahawks. But as long as **Terrell Davis** is in the lineup, the line probably will appear to be playing better than it actually is. ... The Seahawks could be one of the most improved teams in the NFL just because they probably won't have as many injuries as last year. And new hire **Pete Rodriguez** should leave his mark on the special teams. It will be interesting to watch quarterback **Warren Moon**, at 41, try to duplicate his performance of '97, when the Seahawks threw for more yards than any team in the league. ... Among the casualties of the Raiders' housecleaning were coach **Joe Bugel**, defensive lineman **Chester McGlockton**, cornerback **Larry Brown**, linebacker **Rob Fredrickson** and the "vertical offense" that **Al Davis** held so dear. New coach **Jon Gruden** is a West Coast offense disciple and is giving the playbook an overhaul. ... For having **Ryan Leaf** to call their own, Chargers fans can thank **Erik Kramer**. If Kramer, a free agent, had chosen the Chargers instead of the Bears, the Chargers may not have felt the urgency to give up so much to the Cardinals in order to trade up to draft Leaf. Instead, it's possible the Chargers would have kept the No. 3 pick in the draft and landed defensive end **Andre Wadsworth**. **TSN**

Senior writer Dan Pompei covers the NFL for THE SPORTING NEWS.

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

CHOSEN BY TSN EDITORS AND WRITERS

EAST	CENTRAL	WEST
1. New England	1. Pittsburgh	1. Kansas City
2. New York	2. Jacksonville	2. Denver
3. Miami	3. Tennessee	3. Seattle
4. Buffalo	4. Cincinnati	4. Oakland
5. Indianapolis	5. Baltimore	5. San Diego

AFC CHAMPION: Kansas City.

ALL-AFC TEAM

OFFENSE

WR: Tim Brown, Oakland.
WR: Joey Galloway, Seattle.
TE: Shannon Sharpe, Denver.
T: Tony Boselli, Jacksonville.
T: Jonathan Ogden, Baltimore.
G: Kevin Donnalley, Miami.
G: Dave Szott, Kansas City.
C: Dermontti Dawson, Pittsburgh.
QB: John Elway, Denver.
RB: Terrell Davis, Denver.
FB: Kimble Anders, Kansas City.

DEFENSE

E: Mike Sinclair, Seattle.
T: Cortez Kennedy, Seattle.
T: Joel Steed, Pittsburgh.
E: Bruce Smith, Buffalo.
OLB: Chad Brown, Seattle.
ILB: Levon Kirkland, Pittsburgh.
OLB: John Mobley, Denver.
CB: James Hasty, Kansas City.
CB: Carnell Lake, Pittsburgh.
S: Jason Belsler, Indianapolis.
S: Lawyer Milloy, New England.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K: Pete Stoyanovich, Kansas City.
P: Leo Araguz, Oakland.
KR: Tamarick Vanover, Kansas City.

GOING DEEP

Best coach: Mike Shanahan, Denver.
Best coaching staff: Kansas City.
Best front office: Pittsburgh.
Worst front office: Cincinnati.
Best home-field advantage: Kansas City.
Best offensive backfield: Denver.
Best receivers: Cincinnati.
Best offensive line: Jacksonville.
Best defensive line: Kansas City.
Best linebackers: Pittsburgh.
Best secondary: Kansas City.
Most overrated player: Ted Washington, DT, Buffalo.
Most underrated player: Rodney Harrison, SS, San Diego.
Best short-yardage runner: Terrell Davis, RB, Denver.
Best blocking back: Tim Lester, Pittsburgh.
Best receiver out of the backfield: Kimble Anders, Kansas City.
Most fearless receiver: Wayne Chrebet, New York Jets.
Best blocking tight end: Frank Hartley, San Diego.
Hardest hitter: Lawyer Milloy, SS, New England.
Best special teams kamikaze: Larry Whigham, S, New England.
Best pooch punter: Louie Aguiar, Kansas City.

FAST LEARNER



Derrick Rodgers' background belies that he is as close to a natural at linebacker as anyone in the NFL.

Rodgers, 26, never played prep football—he opted for the trumpet instead. After graduating from high school in New Orleans, he spent four years in the Air Force before playing for two seasons at Riverside (Calif.) Community College. Rodgers then transferred to Arizona State, where he played one more full season and earned first-team All-Pac-10 honors.

Rodgers' temperament also sets him apart. After some Dolphins losses last season, as his teammates walked off the field in near-despair, Rodgers would shoot a glance at a reporter he was friendly with, sneak a sly grin, then let out a light chuckle.

It was as if Rodgers was saying, "Ain't life grand?" "That's just the way I approach this," Rodgers says. "It probably has something to do with the

an unseasoned player.

The Dolphins gave Rodgers a tutor to speed that process. With assistant Joel Collier's help, Rodgers quickly learned enough to be competent on the field—so much so that he finished fourth on the team with 91 tackles, leading the team until getting hurt midway through the season.

"Derrick is obviously a very bright person and serious about what it takes to do his job, so that made it easy from a teaching standpoint," Collier says. "But to be comfortable on the field at this level after such a short time in practice is phenomenal."

Then again, Rodgers has set his goals very high. "I thought, right up until I got hurt and slowed down at the end of the season, that I could make it to the Pro Bowl as a rookie," Rodgers says without being particularly boastful or falsely confident. "Early in the season, the game seemed so natural. I was just running around going after the ball

The Dolphins' Derrick Rodgers has come a long way in a short time

fact that I took the road less traveled. ... I never wanted to be a guy who had a regular 9-to-5 job and wasn't really into it. In this job, I want to be enthusiastic all the time because I think that guys feed on that."

The thinking by some NFL people was that opposing linemen would feed on Rodgers. At 6-1 and 225 pounds ("I fight to keep weight on," he says), Rodgers was expected to be a project who *might* be a solid player after a few seasons in the weight room.

When Rodgers played defensive end at Arizona State, he made up for his lack of bulk with blurring quickness. He had 12 sacks and once recorded two safeties in the same game. At the pro level, Rodgers seemed to fit as a situational pass rusher; indeed, he finished tied for second on the team with five sacks. But the big surprise was that he became a starting linebacker by the end of training camp.

Linebacking at the professional level has been a difficult thing to learn for many life-long players. More than any other defender, linebackers must be ready to execute every aspect of the defense—cover pass routes, blitz the quarterback, read the backfield. Learning the complicated drops and reads was supposed to be a slow process for such

BUILDING ON ROOKIE SUCCESS

Chapter 2

and coming up with plays. It sort of seemed easy."

There were problems, though. Teams started to take advantage of Rodgers' and his young teammates' aggressiveness by running

play-action fakes at them. The value of playing the assignment first and letting the other players do their job became clear.

But the sometimes-serious nature of football never became so clear to Rodgers. His teammates, who had been going through the ritualistic side of football since their Pop Warner days, always looked at Rodgers as something of a deviant. For example, there was the time before last year's home game against the Bills when Rodgers came running onto the field, leaping and cavorting to get his team and the fans going. He was in street clothes, inactive for the game with a knee injury.

"I probably should have been taking it easy on my knee, but that was a crucial time and I wanted to contribute any way I could. If I helped get the guys going, that's what I could do," Rodgers says. "During games, guys look at me for big plays. I couldn't make a play, but I could get into it."

TSN

Jason Cole covers the Dolphins for the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel.



New-look Bills make changes hoping to regain some of their old luster

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 4th

BY SAL MAIORANA

When the Bills convened at minicamp in late April, their first gathering as a team since the retirement of coach Marv Levy, a photographer jokingly suggested that new coach Wade Phillips strike the Heisman pose.

Phillips retorted, "No, I'll strike the coach's pose," and he chewed on his fingernails while shrouding his face in nervous worry.

It was good for a laugh, but Phillips realizes it won't be a laughing matter as he tries to restore the shine to a team that earlier this decade made opposing coaches choke on their cuticles. Levy won six AFC East titles and four AFC championships during his 12-year tenure, but the team has had just one playoff win since its last Super Bowl flameout in January 1994. Levy left a team with plenty of holes, and now it is up to Phillips to return the team to prominence. With a hard-working and competent defense already in place, Phillips had a nice, sturdy block from which to build. So he turned his attention to the offense, which finished 29th in points scored and 25th in yards gained in 1997.

He installed a new coordinator (Joe Pendry), system (two-back, two-receiver), quarterback (Rob Johnson), fullback (Sam Gash) and right guard (Joe Panos), and each change is an upgrade. The special teams received a much-needed boost with the signing of return man Kevin Williams, and the changes have renewed excitement about the team.

"We're behind and I want everybody to know that," Phillips said. "We're behind because we went 6-10 last year, and we're behind because we're installing all new things with new personnel. But I think we can meet the challenge."

COACHING

After 12 years of listening to Levy wax poetic about Winston Churchill and World War II, the Bills enter a new era with the down-home Phillips. In many ways, Phillips is similar to Levy, but one key difference is that Phillips is a straight-shooter who tells it like it is; they know he won't massage their egos if they don't perform.

Linebackers coach Ted Cottrell was promoted to defensive coordinator, but Phillips obviously will provide input on defensive strategy. Pendry will be given autonomy on offense. Though he was criticized heavily in Carolina, his offense played a major role in the Panthers making it to the NFC championship game in their second year of existence.

Levy is a Buffalo icon—his name already is on the team's Wall of Fame—but it was time for him to retire, and Phillips seems the perfect fit for this team.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Few players have gotten as much mileage out of one career start in the NFL as Rob Johnson. Because Johnson was 20-of-24 for 294 yards and two touchdowns in Jacksonville's season-opening 28-27 victory over Baltimore last season, he became hot off-season property and the Bills were thrilled to get him in a trade for draft picks.

Johnson has the size and physical skills to be successful, but the key is how he reacts playing full time. Is he going to be a one-game wonder, or will he be consistent and solve the Bills' gaping quarterback problem? Bet on the latter.

Should Johnson struggle, Doug Flutie could be an effective stop-gap measure, but this team will ride Johnson as long as he can carry them.

RUNNING BACKS—Thurman Thomas still will make worthwhile contributions, but they will come in a reserve role because the torch has been passed to Antowain Smith. Phillips says Smith, the team's top draft pick in 1997, needs to be on the field. While playing second fiddle to Thomas last year, Smith gained 840 yards. Smith's combination of size and speed makes him a perfect fit for Pendry's conventional



Antowain Smith is coming off a solid rookie season, and his abilities should be a perfect fit in new coordinator Joe Pendry's scheme.

two-back system, which relies on a punishing ground game to open up the passing game. But Smith needs to work on his blocking and receiving skills. If Smith doesn't improve in those areas, Thomas likely will see time on obvious passing situations because he is a better receiver and blocker in blitz pickup.

The addition of a fullback should help. Gash is a punishing blocker who can lead Smith into the hole, and he can be valuable in pass protection, which would allow Smith or Thomas to get into the pattern. Gash will be backed up by rookie Jonathan Linton, a promising player because of his combination of size, speed and receiving skills.

RECEIVERS—At some point, Andre Reed and Quinn Early will start slowing down, but that time doesn't appear imminent. Reed remains one of the best receivers in the game, and his slight decline in production can be traced directly to last year's quarterbacking. He still is the Bills' go-to guy. Early, a consummate pro, runs precise routes and catches almost everything within his reach. He hasn't been the explosive game-breaker the Bills hoped, but Johnson's strong arm should give Early an opportunity to catch some deep balls.

Former first-round pick Eric Moulds needs to make a statement. He has floundered for two seasons, and because he has been unable to

unseat Reed or Early, his attitude has suffered.

No teams showed interest in free-agent tight end Lonnie Johnson, so he signed a one-year deal to return. If he wants to attract interest on the market next year, he has to upgrade his production. True, he catches a lot of passes (139 in the past four years), but he rarely makes big plays (three touchdowns).

LINE—It was a disaster last season, allowing 46 sacks and numerous hurries and knockdowns. But Pendry's new offense, which emphasizes three- and five-step drops, will take some pressure off the line and the quarterback.

Left tackle John Fina is adequate. He handles speed rushers decently because he is athletic, but bull rushers give him huge problems. Left guard Ruben Brown has made the Pro Bowl two years in a row, which is hard to figure. Brown does nothing extraordinary; he's just a good, solid player who has to start minimizing his mental mistakes. Dusty Zeigler replaced center Kent Hull last year and proved he has a future with his steady play. Zeigler, a quiet, low-key player, has questionable leadership skills, though, and center is a position where a leader is needed.

The right side is where the Bills really struggled, so they addressed that in free agency by signing Panos from the Eagles. Panos is a gritty, tough customer with a mean streak, which former starter Corbin Lacinia lacked. Jerry Ostroski played center and right guard last year before moving to right tackle. Ostroski probably is better-suited to guard, but he will remain on the outside because the Bills didn't go after a free-agent tackle. He has a guard's stocky body but has quick feet, and offensive line coach Carl Mauck sees potential.

This is one area where the Bills can't afford injuries. Second-year players Jamie Nails and Marcus Spriggs are the top reserves at tackle and guard, and neither appears ready to play. Third-round pick Robert Hicks probably is a year or two away.

DEFENSE

LINE—Bruce Smith will be 35 when the season begins, but he still is a dominating player. Smith has slowed in each of the past two seasons after quick starts. In 1996, he had two sacks in his last five games; last year, he had one sack in his last five games. Age and sore knees are the problem, and the team needs to relieve some of the pressure. Second-year man Marcellus Wiley, a quick pass rusher who lacks refinement, could be the answer, but he'll need to improve this season.

At the other end is underrated workaholic Phil Hansen, who tied for second on the team in tackles (122) and quarterback pressures (18) and was second in sacks (six). Hansen's pass rush could be hurt by the departure of linebacker Bryce Paup, who used to line up and rush from the same side as Hansen.

Inside, Ted Washington moves from nose tackle to right tackle in the new 4-3 defense. Washington earned his first Pro Bowl berth last season, recording a team-high 124 tackles despite playing a position where he was double-teamed on every play.

Sean Moran played well after being plugged into the left tackle position last year when the Bills switched from the 3-4 at midseason, but he's coming off knee surgery and can't afford to lose any quickness.

LINEBACKERS—Though Paup's departure will hurt the pass rush, the switch to the 4-3 defense actually made him expendable. He wasn't comfortable in the 4-3 last year because he was forced into more pass coverage, the weakest part of his game.

Sam Rogers, who has shown steady progress as the starter at right outside linebacker, will be moved to

Buffalo Bills

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
13	Ballard, Jim	6-3/223	4-16-72	2	Mount Union (Ohio)	FA/97	0/0
15	Collins, Todd	6-4/224	11-5-71	4	Michigan	D2/95	14/13
7	Flutie, Doug	5-10/175	10-23-62	5	Boston College	FA/98	18/18*
11	Johnson, Rob	6-4/214	3-18-73	4	USC	T-JAX/98	5/1*
10	Van Pelt, Alex	6-0/220	5-1-70	3	Pittsburgh	FA/94	6/3

Running Backs

33	Gash, Sam (FB)	6-0/235	3-7-69	6	Penn State	FA/98	16/5*
44	Holmes, Darick	6-0/226	7-1-71	4	Portland State	D7b/95	13/0
25	Ingoglia, Rene	5-10/202	5-23-72	1	Massachusetts	FA/97	0/0
35	Linton, Jonathan (FB)	6-0/248	10-7-74	0	North Carolina	D5/98	—
23	Smith, Antowain	6-2/224	3-14-72	2	Houston	D1/97	16/0
34	Thomas, Thurman	5-10/198	5-16-66	11	Oklahoma State	D2/88	16/16

Receivers

81	Coleman, Fred	6-1/190	1-31-75	0	Washington	D6/98	—
88	Early, Quinn	6-0/190	4-13-65	11	Iowa	FA/96	16/16
48	Fitzgerald, Pat (TE)	6-2/228	12-4-74	1	Texas	D7/97	0/0
17	Galloway, Mitchell	5-8/178	10-8-74	2	East Carolina	FA/97	3/0
84	Johnson, Lonnie (TE)	6-3/240	2-14-71	4	Florida State	D2b/94	16/16
45	Loud, Kamil	6-0/190	6-25-76	0	Cal Poly-SLO	D7b/98	—
80	Moulds, Eric	6-0/204	7-17-73	3	Mississippi State	D1/96	16/8
83	Reed, Andre	6-2/190	1-29-64	14	Kutztown (Pa.) State	D4a/85	15/15
81	Reese, Jerry	5-11/190	3-18-73	2	San Jose State	FA/97	5/0
85	Riemersma, Jay (TE)	6-5/254	5-17-73	2	Michigan	D7b/96	16/8
82	Williams, Kevin (KR)	5-9/195	1-25-71	6	Miami (Fla.)	FA/98	16/0*
49	Young, Duane (TE)	6-3/270	5-29-68	6	Michigan State	FA/98	0/0*

Offensive Linemen

76	Albright, Ethan	6-5/283	5-1-71	4	North Carolina	FA/96	16/0
66	Allotey, Victor (G)	6-3/325	4-8-75	0	Indiana	D7a/98	—
70	Brown, Ruben (G)	6-3/304	2-13-72	4	Pittsburgh	D1/95	16/16
63	Conaty, Billy	6-2/306	3-8-73	2	Virginia Tech	FA/97	1/0
70	Fina, John (T)	6-4/285	3-11-69	7	Arizona	D1/92	16/16
77	Hicks, Robert (T)	6-7/338	11-17-74	0	Mississippi State	D3/98	—
74	Nails, Jamie (T)	6-6/354	6-3-75	1	Florida A&M	D4/97	2/0
60	Ostroski, Jerry (G)	6-4/310	7-12-70	5	Tulsa	FA/93	16/16
72	Panos, Joe (G)	6-2/293	1-24-71	5	Wisconsin	FA/98	13/13*
73	Rockwood, Mike (T)	6-10/345	6-8-73	1	Nevada	FA/97	1/0
69	Spriggs, Marcus (T)	6-3/295	5-17-74	2	Houston	D6/97	2/0
61	Zeigler, Dusty (C)	6-5/298	9-27-73	2	Notre Dame	D6b/96	13/13

Defensive Linemen

90	Hansen, Phil (E)	6-5/278	5-20-68	8	North Dakota State	D2/91	16/16
98	Moran, Sean (E)	6-3/275	6-5-73	3	Colorado State	D4/96	16/7
94	Pike, Mark (E)	6-4/272	12-27-63	12	Georgia Tech	D7b/86	15/0
91	Price, Shawn (E)	6-5/285	3-28-70	6	Pacific	FA/96	10/0
78	Smith, Bruce (E)	6-4/273	6-18-63	14	Virginia Tech	D1a/85	16/16
92	Washington, Ted (NT)	6-4/325	4-13-68	8	Louisville	FA/95	16/16
75	Wiley, Marcellus (E)	6-5/271	11-30-74	2	Columbia	D2/97	16/0
93	Williams, Pat (T)	6-3/270	10-24-72	1	Texas A&M	FA/97	1/0

Linebackers

96	Brandenburg, Dan	6-3/240	2-16-73	2	Indiana State	D7a/96	12/0
56	Cowart, Sam	6-2/239	2-26-75	R	Florida State	D2/98	—
51	Cummings, Joe	6-2/242	6-8-74	2	Wyoming	FA/98	0/0*
52	Holecsek, John	6-2/242	5-7-72	2	Illinois	D5/95	14/8
99	Northern, Gabe	6-2/240	6-8-74	3	LSU	D2/96	16/1
58	Perry, Marlo	6-4/250	8-25-72	4	Jackson State	D3a/94	13/0
59	Rogers, Sam	6-3/245	5-30-70	5	Colorado	D2c/94	15/15
95	Sabb, Dwayne	6-4/248	10-9-69	7	New Hampshire	FA/98	0/0*
54	Spielman, Chris	6-0/247	10-11-65	11	Ohio State	FA/96	8/8

Defensive Backs

27	Irvin, Ken (CB)	5-10/186	7-11-72	4	Memphis	D4a/95	16/0
31	Jackson, Raymond	5-10/189	2-17-73	3	Colorado State	D5/96	9/0
20	Jones, Henry (S)	5-11/197	12-29-67	8	Illinois	D1/91	15/15
46	Kerner, Marlon (CB)	5-10/187	3-18-73	4	Ohio State	D3a/95	13/2
21	Martin, Emanuel (S)	5-11/184	7-31-69	3	Alabama State	FA/96	16/2
24	Schulz, Kurt (S)	6-1/208	12-12-68	7	Eastern Washington	D7/92	15/14
40	Smedley, Eric (S)	5-11/199	7-23-73	3	Indiana	D7c/96	13/1
36	Smith, Adrian (CB)	5-10/175	9-29-71	1	Southwest Missouri	FA/98	0/0*
28	Smith, Thomas (CB)	5-11/188	12-5-70	6	North Carolina	D1/93	16/16
37	Woodson, Sean (S)	6-0/214	8-27-74	1	Jackson State	D5/97	1/0

Specialists

2	Christie, Steve (K)	6-0/185	11-13-67	9	William & Mary	PlanB/92	16/0
9	Mohr, Chris (P)	6-5/215	5-11-66	9	Alabama	FA/91	16/0
3	Phair, John (K)	6-8/235	2-23-71	1	Fort Lewis (Colo.)	FA/98	0/0*

Other free agents invited to camp

Gerald Carlson, P; Jason Crebo, LB; Shane Doyle, DE; James Grier, DT; Ray Hill, CB; Herb Howard, DT; Todd Kollar, OT; Carl McCullough, RB; Hardy Mitchell, DT; Dave Mudge, OT; Mark Nohra, RB; Willie Rodgers, LB/DE; Hassan Shamsid-Deen, CB; Duane Stewart, S; Paul Turner, WR; Pooh Bear Williams, FB; Dan Williams, C; Undre Williams, WR.

*—Not with Bills in 1997.

Buffalo OFFENSE

WR Reed Moulds

LT Fina Nails

LG R. Brown Rockwood

QB R. Johnson Flutie
(C) Zeigler Conaty

RG Panos Spriggs

RT Ostroski Hicks

TE L. Johnson Riemersma

WR Early K. Williams

RB A. Smith Thomas

FB Gash Linton

K: Christie
P: Mohr
KR: K. Williams
PR: K. Williams

CB T. Smith
R. Jackson

RE B. Smith Wiley

RT Moran Williams

LT Washington Price

LE Hansen Pike

CB Kerner Irvin

Probable starters listed on top

OLB Rogers Perry

FS Schulz Martin

ILB Spielman Holecek

SS H. Jones Smedley

OLB Northern Cowart

Buffalo DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Doug Flutie, QB (FA/CFL); Sam Gash, FB (FA/Patriots); Rob Johnson, QB (trade/Jaguars); Joe Panos, G (FA/Eagles); Dwayne Sabb, LB (released/Patriots); Kevin Williams, WR/KR (FA/Cardinals); Duane Young, TE (FA/out of football).

Key losses: Jeff Burris, CB (FA/Colts); Tony Cline, TE (FA/Raiders); Damien Covington, LB (injured); Corbin Lacina, G (FA/Panthers); Corey Louchiey, OT (FA/Falcons); Mark Maddox, LB (FA/Cardinals); Bryce Paup, LB (FA/Jaguars); Steve Tasker, WR (retired); Tim Tindale, FB (FA/Bears).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
2nd	Sam Cowart	LB	Florida State
3rd	Robert Hicks	T	Mississippi State
5th	Jonathan Linton	RB	North Carolina
6th	Fred Coleman	WR	Washington
7th	Victor Allotey	G	Indiana
7th	Kamil Loud	WR	Cal Poly-SLO

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	CB Thomas Smith	Starter with Bills
1994	CB Jeff Burris	Starter with Colts
1995	G Ruben Brown	Starter with Bills
1996	WR Eric Moulds	Reserve with Bills
1997	RB Antowain Smith	Starter with Bills

Coaching Staff

Coach: Wade Phillips. **Offensive staff:** Max Bowman (assistant to the coach/tight ends) • Chris Dickson (offensive quality control) • Bishop Harris (running backs) • Charlie Joiner (receivers) • Carl Mauck (offensive line) •

Joe Pendry (offensive coordinator) • Turk Schonert (quarterbacks). **Defensive staff:** Bill Bradley (defensive backs) • Ted Cottrell (defensive coordinator) • John Levra (defensive line). **Others:** Bruce DeHaven (special teams) • Rusty Jones (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 6-10 (4th in AFC East); 5-3 in division; 5-7 in conference; 4-4 at home; 2-6 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Phillips' regular-season record: first season with Bills; 16-16 in two seasons with Broncos.

Phillips' postseason record: 0-1 in one appearance with Broncos.

Team record past five years: 45-35 (.563, ranks T7th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1996.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*291.1	14	25
Rushing offense	*111.4	7	14
Passing offense	*179.7	14	25
Scoring offense	255	15	29
Total defense	*303.3	4	9
Rushing defense	*112	9	15
Passing defense	*191.3	3	12
Scoring defense	367	11	23
Takeaways	22	T14	T26
Giveaways	42	15	T28
Turnover differential	-20	15	28
Sacks	46	T4	T8
Sacks allowed	46	T10	T21

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Considering he had to share rushing duties with Thurman Thomas and didn't start a game last season, Antowain Smith's first-year numbers compare favorably with the rookie totals of some other notable Buffalo backs:

Year	Player	G	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
1962	Cookie Gilchrist	14	214	1,096	5.1	13
1969	O.J. Simpson	13	181	697	3.9	2
1978	Terry Miller	16	238	1,060	4.5	7
1980	Joe Cribbs	16	306	1,185	3.9	11
1988	Thurman Thomas	15	207	881	4.3	2
1997	Antowain Smith	16	194	840	4.3	8

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at San Diego	1:15
Sept. 13	at Miami	1:01
Sept. 20	ST. LOUIS	1:01
Sept. 27	Open date	
Oct. 4	SAN FRANCISCO	1:01
Oct. 11	at Indianapolis	12:01
Oct. 18	JACKSONVILLE	1:01
Oct. 25	at Carolina	8:20
Nov. 1	MIAMI	1:01
Nov. 8	at N.Y. Jets	4:15
Nov. 15	NEW ENGLAND	1:01
Nov. 22	INDIANAPOLIS	1:01
Nov. 29	at New England	4:05
Dec. 6	at Cincinnati	1:01
Dec. 13	OAKLAND	1:01
Dec. 19	N.Y. JETS (Mon.)	12:35
Dec. 27	at New Orleans	12:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T27TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	MINNESOTA	L	13-34
Sept. 7	at N.Y. Jets	W	28-22
Sept. 14	at Kansas City	L	16-22
Sept. 21	INDIANAPOLIS	W	37-35
Sept. 28	Open date		
Oct. 5	DETROIT	W	22-13
Oct. 12	at New England	L	6-33
Oct. 20	at Indianapolis	W	9-6
Oct. 26	DENVER (OT)	L	20-23
Nov. 2	MIAMI	W	9-6
Nov. 9	NEW ENGLAND	L	10-31
Nov. 17	at Miami	L	13-30
Nov. 23	at Tennessee	L	14-31
Nov. 30	N.Y. JETS	W	20-10
Dec. 7	at Chicago	L	3-20
Dec. 14	JACKSONVILLE	L	14-20
Dec. 20	at Green Bay	L	21-31

Miscellaneous

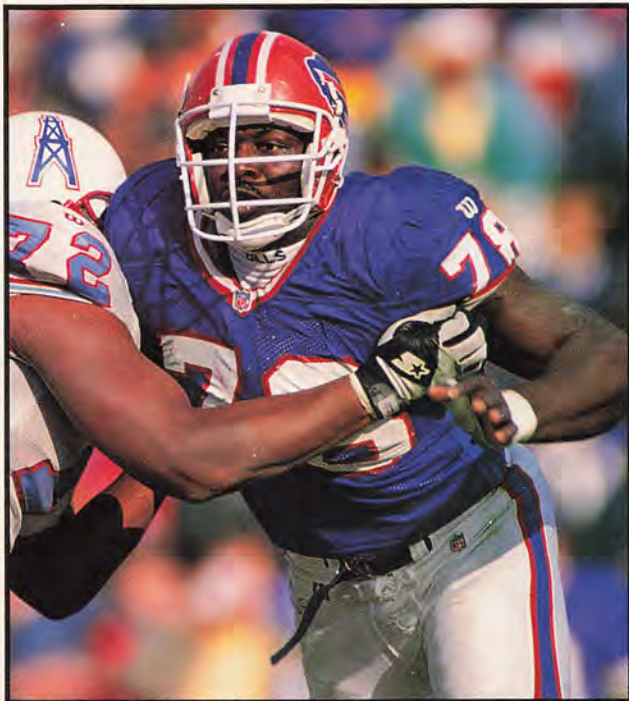
President: Ralph C. Wilson Jr.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Rich Stadium (80,091, artificial).

Ticket information: 716-649-0015.

Flagship radio station: WGRF-FM, 96.9; WEDG-FM, 103.3.

Training site: Fredonia State University, Fredonia, N.Y.; 716-648-1800.



Age and some nagging injuries have taken a toll on Bruce Smith's productivity, but he still is one of the best defensive ends in the NFL.

the left to take Paup's spot. Rogers isn't a flashy playmaker, but he's steady.

Gabe Northern will get first crack at replacing Rogers on the right side. Northern has shown good pass-rushing skills and is a little quicker than Paup, which should aid him on his coverage drops.

The loss of inside linebackers Chris Spielman and Damien Covington to injuries at midseason last year prompted the switch to the 4-3. Though Covington's career likely is over, Spielman could flourish as a true middle linebacker if he can bounce back from neck surgery. No one studies or prepares like Spielman, but the question remains as to whether he will play with the same ferocity. Phillips has taken a cautious approach with Spielman, and backup John Holecek will get plenty of reps in camp.

Marlo Perry will return as the team's dime linebacker, but he doesn't make many key plays even though pass coverage is his best asset. Rookie Sam Cowart, a second-round choice from Florida State, can play inside or outside, and he may even get a look at the dime position because he is agile and can cover. Free-agent pickup Dwayne Sabb, who started for the Patriots during their 1996 Super Bowl run, and Dan Brandenburg also are in the mix on the outside.

SECONDARY—This unit produced just nine (of the team's 15) interceptions last season, and the main reason was an inability to catch the ball. The Bills dropped countless interceptions, and the failure to create more turnovers often cost them dearly.

Marlon Kerner is coming off reconstructive knee surgery, but he has made excellent progress and should be ready to take a stab at replacing left cornerback Jeff Burris, who signed a free-agent deal with Indianapolis. Kerner will battle Ken Irvin, and it will be an interesting fight because they are similar in size and style. The loser will play in nickel and dime situations, most likely joined by Manny Martin.

At right cornerback is Thomas Smith, one of the best cover men in the league. Smith had no interceptions last year for two reasons: He has probably the worst hands of anyone in the secondary and opposing quarterbacks don't like to throw his way.

Strong safety Henry Jones played in the Pro Bowl after the 1992 season, but injuries have prevented him from returning to All-Star form. Jones still supports the run strongly, but he can be beaten in coverage, especially by big and physical tight ends. Hard-hitting Kurt Schulz, who makes a lot of tackles but seems to miss them at inopportune times, will be at free safety.

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	C+	Defensive line:	A
Offensive backfield:	B+	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	C-	Secondary:	C
Receivers:	B	Special teams:	C+

SPECIAL TEAMS

The retirement of seven-time Pro Bowler Steve Tasker left a gaping hole on the kicking teams. But even with Tasker last season, the Bills' special teams were among the worst in the league. They ranked last in kickoff coverage (allowing three touchdown returns) and 29th in kickoff returns (19.7 yards), kicker Steve Christie managed only five touchbacks on kickoffs and punter Chris Mohr ranked 26th in gross punting (41.4 yards).

The team hopes it has solved its return woes by signing Williams, who tied for fifth in the league last year at 24.7 yards per return with the Cardinals. He also should help the team's ineffective punt returning, as he was tied for seventh at 11.6 yards per return.

As far as coverage, Mark Pike—who actually is the team's leading career special teams tackler, far ahead of Tasker—is back for a final year, and he has made it his mission to go out with a bang. He will have help from a young band of players who learned some humiliating lessons last season.

Christie, whose primary asset is his ability to overcome the tricky and gusty winds at Rich Stadium, is one of the most reliable kickers in the league. Mohr doesn't get great length on his punts; he does get tremendous hang time, which is why the Bills consistently rank high in punt coverage. Last year, opponents returned only 44 of Mohr's 91 punts.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The team's reward for sinking to fourth place in the AFC East was a schedule that features only six games against four 1997 playoff teams (Miami and New England twice each, San Francisco and Jacksonville). Four of those six are at home.

The Bills could get themselves back into the postseason if they take advantage of this relatively easy schedule (opponents were 119-137), but the key could be the first two games of the season. For the first time since 1973, the Bills play their first two games on the road, against San Diego and Miami. Both will be hot-weather games on grass, and the team hasn't won on a natural surface in its past 11 games (dating to October 1995). Getting off to an 0-2 start could be difficult for the Bills to overcome, but a split or a 2-0 start could get them on their way to contention for the division title.

There are only two other games on grass—at Carolina and New England—and the Carolina game is the only one at night, an ESPN Sunday game.

The Bills get a break in that they will have two weeks to prepare for an October 4 home game against the 49ers, as their bye comes the week before. In addition, two of their last three games are at home, against Oakland and the Jets, and if they need to win the season finale to get into the playoffs, it will be indoors at New Orleans.

The toughest stretch occurs in October, when the team plays San Francisco, at Indianapolis, Jacksonville and at Carolina. If the Bills can at least split the first two games of the season and come out of this stretch no worse than 2-2, a playoff berth is possible.

BOTTOM LINE

The Bills undeniably will be better at quarterback, and the switch to a more conventional two-back offense will make better use of the team's personnel, so improvement is almost guaranteed.

If the defense can create more turnovers and the special teams don't break down and perhaps contribute a couple of scores and some turnovers, the Bills have what it takes to make it back to the playoffs. But if any unit fails, a sub-.500 record is possible.

TSN

Sal Maiorana covers the Bills for the Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle.



With Manning and new staff in tow, time appears right for Colts to improve

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 5th

BY MIKE CHAPPELL

Colts owner Jim Irsay has been around the NFL long enough to realize the importance of timing. "Timing is everything," he said. "When you look at the total picture, I don't think there is any question the stars have been lined up for us."

In 1997, the stars the Colts saw too often were dancing dizzily over their head. They absorbed a league-high 13 losses, which led to wholesale changes. Dismissed were director of football operations Bill Tobin and coach Lindy Infante. Brought in to revitalize a wobbly franchise were Bill Polian, as club president, and Jim Mora, as the team's eighth head or interim coach since 1984.

Two other factors, though, will prove just as vital in determining how quickly the Colts, who reached the AFC title game three years ago, can return to playoff contention. First, Irsay finalized lease negotiations with city officials that will increase the team's RCA Dome-generated revenue and keep the franchise in Indianapolis for at least the next decade. Next, the team used the first pick in the draft on Tennessee quarterback Peyton Manning.

"It's as close to a totally new beginning while still being in the same place," Irsay said. "This is a new era and an exciting time for us. But again, things have to line up for you."

"Jim Harbaugh was 34, he wasn't 30. On the last weekend of the season, we lost to Minnesota and Arizona won, so we're picking first instead of fifth. Manning could have decided to come out last year instead of staying in school. We were able to get the lease situation resolved, which puts us in a position of strength. Believe me, I have learned you take what the football gods give you."

COACHING

For whatever reason, the team never warmed up to Infante in his two seasons in town. Players considered him inflexible and unapproachable. The early indications point to a better relationship with Mora and his staff. That doesn't mean things will be warm and fuzzy with Mora, who coached the Saints from 1986-96, in control. He's a disciplinarian who demands nothing short of 100 percent, whether it's on the practice field or game day.

The major difference between Mora and Infante is Mora won't be burdened with coordinator duties. Infante also ran the offense, a task that now rests with Tom Moore. And whereas Infante's *system* was paramount, Moore seems to be more adaptable to his personnel. In Detroit, he structured an offense in 1995 that led the league in total offense (382.1 yards per game), featured two receivers (Herman Moore and Brett Perriman) with at least 100 catches and a runner (Barry Sanders) with 1,500 yards rushing.

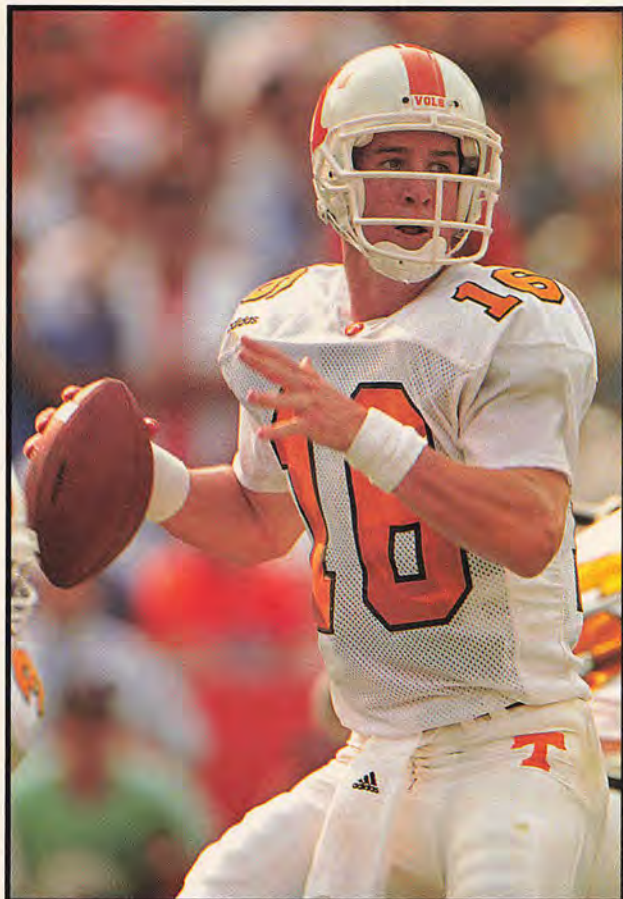
If there's a man on the spot, it's Bruce Arians, who was fired as Alabama offensive coordinator after last season. Manning's arrival convinced management to have a quarterback coach for the first time. It will be Arians' task to nurture Manning's development.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—The future is Manning. So is the present. He was anointed the starter the moment the team made him the first pick in the draft.

The consensus among league talent scouts is that Manning is as prepared to play in the NFL as any rookie quarterback since Dan Marino and John Elway in 1983. He had a reasonable grasp of the team's offense during an April minicamp, showed additional progress during June workouts and displayed his uncanny field presence throughout.

The Colts are banking on Manning being as ready and as good as advertised. To make room for his arrival, they traded Harbaugh to



The Colts are counting on Manning, who won't have much offensive help, to be the starter from Day One. If he falters, a poor season is guaranteed.

Baltimore and backup Paul Justin to Cincinnati.

With Manning atop the depth chart, the Colts will enter the season with one of the least-experienced quarterback corps in league history. Potential backups Bill Musgrave and Kelly Holcomb have combined to make 17 appearances, two in starting roles, and throw just 142 passes. Musgrave, a free agent who didn't play in 1997, has gained valuable experience while playing behind San Francisco's Steve Young and Elway, but hasn't had to play an extended role.

RUNNING BACKS—The team's strength can be found in a young, deep backfield headed by Marshall Faulk. After debuting in 1994 with career highs in rushes (314) and yards (1,282), Faulk has seen his role as a runner diminish as he assumed a heavier load in the passing game. He ranked third on the team with 47 receptions a year ago, but averaged only 16.5 carries a game. Faulk will remain a receiving threat, as the team attempts to lock him up on slower linebackers, but he can anticipate a steady diet of handoffs from Manning. Faulk has yearned to carry the ball 22-25 times a game, and that's conceivable if game conditions remain favorable.

The anticipated reliance on Faulk will serve two purposes. First, it will more fully maximize what Faulk does best, which is run the ball. Second, it will ease the pressure that will follow Manning through his rookie season.

Faulk will be the feature performer, but his supporting cast is ample.

Lamont Warren wasn't given many opportunities to contribute last season but has proven to be a capable backup. Both are 25 and have yet to reach their peak.

Fullback Zack Crockett, meanwhile, has a quick burst, can shed tacklers and can catch passes. His main drawback is that he doesn't provide the no-nonsense lead blocking Faulk prefers and the offense may require. If the main men remain healthy, backup fullbacks Cliff Groce and Chris Hetherington could be relegated to special-teams duties.

RECEIVERS—Manning will have a dependable target in Marvin Harrison, one of the league's rising stars. In two years, Harrison has run precise routes, shown no fear of going over the middle, displayed sticky hands and gotten better at doing damage after the catch. More telling, he has averaged one touchdown for every 9.8 catches. But beyond Harrison, uncertainty reigns among the receivers.

Aaron Bailey and Torrance Small, a free agent from the Rams, will vie for the other starting position, but neither's resume can match Harrison's. Bailey has averaged 15.5 yards per catch during his career, but his durability is a question mark. Small has 17 career touchdowns and shown a knack for working over the middle but has caught as many as 50 passes just once in his seven-year career.

Since Sean Dawkins and Brian Stablein left as free agents, assistance must come from rookies Jerome Pathon (Washington) and E.G. Green (Florida State). The team's second- and third-round draft picks, respectively, bring playmaking abilities the unit sorely needs.

Tight ends Ken Dilger and Marcus Pollard should anticipate an expanded role in the team's new system. Dilger was limited to a career-low 27 receptions a year ago, too often being forced to shore up pass protection. When properly utilized, he can create havoc downfield.

LINE—In what is becoming an annual ritual, this unit endured another offseason of realignment. Sooner or later, these guys are going to get it right. The well-being of Manning and Faulk is depending on it.

Tarik Glenn, last year's 335-pound first-round pick, was forced to play a foreign position (right guard) after lengthy contract negotiations. But he'll open his second season at his natural position of left tackle and, if he's up to the task, will use his size and strength to be Manning's backside guardian for years to come.

Glenn's relocation resulted in Adam Meadows moving from left to right tackle and Tony Mandarich sliding from right tackle to right guard. Meadows occasionally had trouble with speed rushers on the left side and may be better-suited for the right side. The move of Mandarich inside could better utilize his size and strength.

Tom Myslinski, a free-agent signee from Pittsburgh who proved to be a valuable backup for the Steelers, is the left guard. The only player who will return to a familiar position is center Jay Leeuwenburg, who's coming off a solid season.

Depth remains a concern, particularly at tackle. Interior support could come from rookie Steve McKinney, a Texas A&M product who was the team's fourth-round pick. The club is optimistic Eric Mahlum can contribute at guard, but he still is trying to come back from a knee injury sustained in 1995.

Indianapolis Colts

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
13	Holcomb, Kelly	6-2/212	7-9-73	2	Middle Tennessee State	FA/96	5/1
18	Manning, Peyton	6-5/230	3-24-76	R	Tennessee	D1/98	—
3	Musgrave, Bill	6-3/220	11-11-67	7	Oregon	FA/98	0/0*

Running Backs

32	Crockett, Zack (FB)	6-2/246	12-2-72	4	Florida State	D3/95	16/12
23	Elias, Keith	5-9/203	2-3-72	4	Princeton	FA/98	0/0*
28	Faulk, Marshall	5-10/211	2-26-73	5	San Diego State	D1a/94	16/16
33	Groce, Cliff (FB)	5-11/245	7-30-72	3	Texas A&M	FA/95	7/0
44	Hetherington, Chris (FB)	6-3/249	11-27-72	3	Yale	FA/96	16/0
21	Warren, Lamont	5-11/202	1-4-73	5	Colorado	D6/94	13/0

Receivers

80	Bailey, Aaron	5-10/185	10-24-71	5	Louisville	FA/94	13/4
83	Banta, Brad (TE)	6-6/260	12-14-70	5	USC	D4/94	15/0
85	Dilger, Ken (TE)	6-5/259	2-2-71	4	Illinois	D2/95	14/14
11	Green, E.G.	5-11/187	6-28-75	R	Florida State	D3/98	—
88	Harrison, Marvin	6-0/181	8-25-72	3	Syracuse	D1/96	16/15
86	Jacquet, Nate	6-0/173	9-2-75	2	San Diego State	D5a/97	0/0
48	Jurewicz, Bryan (TE)	6-5/302	2-23-74	1	Wisconsin	FA/98	0/0*
10	McGuire, Kaipo	5-10/174	1-16-74	1	Brigham Young	FA/97	3/0
16	Pathon, Jerome	6-0/187	12-16-75	R	Washington	D2/98	—
81	Pollard, Marcus (TE)	6-4/257	2-8-72	4	Bradley (DNP football)	FA/95	16/5
15	Scott, Freddie	5-10/188	8-26-74	3	Penn State	FA/98	2/0*
84	Stutzker, Scott (TE)	6-4/250	12-20-72	3	Iowa	D3/96	12/2
87	Small, Torrance	6-3/209	9-4-70	7	Alcorn State	FA/98	13/7*

Offensive Linemen

78	Glenn, Tarik (T)	6-5/335	5-25-76	2	California	D1/97	16/16
66	Hardin, Steve (G)	6-6/334	12-30-71	2	Oregon	FA/98	0/0*
63	Hayes, Brandon (G)	6-2/305	3-11-73	3	Central State (Ohio)	FA/98	0/0*
60	Johnson, Jason (C)	6-3/281	2-6-74	1	Kansas State	FA/97	0/0
58	Leeuwenburg, Jay (G)	6-3/290	6-18-69	7	Colorado	FA/96	16/16
65	Mahlum, Eric (G)	6-4/302	12-6-70	4	California	D2/94	0/0
79	Mandarich, Tony (G)	6-5/324	9-23-66	7	Michigan State	FA/96	16/16
76	McKinney, Steve (G)	6-4/297	10-15-75	R	Texas A&M	D4/98	—
73	Meadows, Adam (T)	6-5/299	1-25-74	2	Georgia	D2/97	16/16
67	Myslinski, Tom (G)	6-3/293	12-7-68	7	Tennessee	FA/98	16/7*
69	Taylor, Aaron (G)	6-1/320	1-21-75	R	Nebraska	D7a/98	—
71	Vickers, Kipp (T)	6-2/298	8-27-69	4	Miami (Fla.)	FA/93	9/0

Defensive Linemen

99	Fontenot, Al (E)	6-4/287	9-17-70	6	Baylor	FA/97	16/16
78	Footman, Dan (E)	6-5/290	1-13-69	6	Florida State	FA/97	16/10
62	Johnson, Ellis (T)	6-2/292	10-30-73	4	Florida	D1/95	15/15
90	Martin, Steve (T)	6-4/303	5-31-74	3	Missouri	D5/96	12/0
91	McCoey, Tony (NT)	6-0/282	6-10-69	7	Florida	D4b/92	16/11
92	Powell, Carl (E)	6-3/265	1-4-74	2	Louisville	D5b/97	11/0
97	Shello, Kendel (T)	6-3/301	11-24-73	3	Southern	FA/96	6/0
95	Whittington, Bernard (E)	6-6/280	8-20-71	5	Indiana	FA/94	15/6

Linebackers

50	Alexander, Elijah	6-2/237	8-8-70	7	Kansas State	FA/96	13/11
94	Baker, Myron	6-1/232	1-6-71	5	Louisiana Tech	FA/98	2/0*
56	Bennett, Tony	6-2/250	7-1-67	9	Mississippi	FA/94	6/6
57	Berry, Bert	6-2/248	8-15-75	2	Notre Dame	D3/97	10/1
53	Burroughs, Sammie	6-0/227	6-21-73	3	Portland State	FA/96	16/1
55	Coryatt, Quentin	6-3/250	8-1-70	7	Texas A&M	D1b/92	15/15
54	Herrod, Jeff	6-0/249	9-29-66	11	Mississippi	FA/98	10/2*
91	Jordan, Antony	6-2/234	12-19-74	R	Vanderbilt	D5b/98	—
59	Marshall, Whit	6-2/245	1-6-73	2	Georgia	FA/98	0/0*
52	Morrison, Steve	6-3/246	12-28-71	4	Michigan	FA/95	16/9
51	Von Der Ahe, Scott	5-11/242	10-12-75	2	Arizona State	D6/97	9/2

Defensive Backs

29	Belser, Jason	5-9/196	5-28-70	7	Oklahoma	D8a/92	16/16
25	Blackmon, Robert (S)	6-0/208	5-12-67	9	Baylor	FA/97	14/14
20	Burris, Jeff (CB)	6-0/190	6-7-72	5	Notre Dame	FA/98	14/14*
27	Clark, Rico (CB)	5-10/181	6-6-74	1	Louisville	FA/97	4/2
30	Gaines, Cory (S)	5-11/195	5-9-76	R	Tennessee	D7b/98	—
26	Gray, Carlton (CB)	6-0/200	6-26-71	6	UCLA	FA/97	15/13
39	McDaniel, Emmanuel	5-9/180	7-27-72	3	East Carolina	FA/97	3/0
40	McElroy, Ray (CB)	5-11/207	7-31-72	4	Eastern Illinois	D4/95	16/4
34	Montgomery, Monty	5-11/197	12-8-73	2	Houston	D4/97	16/3
43	Rosga, Steve (S)	6-1/205	7-10-74	1	Colorado	FA/98	0/0*

Specialists


14	Blanchard, Cary (K)	6-1/227	11-5-68	6	Oklahoma State	FA/95	16/0
17	Gardocki, Chris (P)	6-1/200	2-7-70	8	Clemson	FA/95	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp


Bruce Beaton, G; William Carr, DT; Larry Chester, DT; Emil Ekiyor, DE; Donnie Embra, DE; Marlon Evans, WR; Je'Ney Jackson, CB; Waverly Jackson, OT; Garrett Johnson, WR; Bryan Jurewicz, TE; Charles Kirby, RB; Jim Kubiak, QB; Peter McFadden, WR; Kaipo McGuire, WR; Larry Moore, G; Melvin Pearsall, TE; Nakia Reddick, S; Mitch Running, WR; Trey Sartin, OT; Clifton Shamburger, CB; Brian Shields, OT; Mike Vanderjagt, P; Abu Wilson, RB.

*—Not with Colts in 1997.


COLTS




Indianapolis OFFENSE




Faulk
Warren




Crockett
Groce




Bailey
Small




Harrison
Pathon




Glenn
Vickers




Myslinski
McKinney




Manning
Musgrave
(C) **Leeuwenburg**
Johnson




Mandarich
Moore




Meadows
Hardin




Dilger
Pollard




Gray
Clark




Bennett
Footman




Johnson
McCoy



Whittington
Martin




Fontenot
Shello




Burris
Montgomery


Indianapolis DEFENSE




Coryatt
Baker




Herrod
Von der Ahe



Morrison
Alexander



Belser
Gaines



Blackmon
McElroy

Probable starters listed on top

K: Blanchard
P: Gardocki
KR: Bailey
PR: Pathon

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Jeff Burris, CB (FA/Bills); Jeff Herrod, LB (FA/Eagles); Bill Musgrave, QB (FA); Tom Myslinski, G (FA/Steelers); Torrance Small, WR (FA/Rams).

Key losses: Sean Dawkins, WR (FA/Saints); Steve Grant, LB (released); Jim Harbaugh, QB (trade/Ravens); Paul Justin, QB (trade/Bengals); Dedric Mathis, CB (waived/Bears); Brian Stablein, WR (FA/Patriots); David Tate, S (FA); Doug Widell, G (released/Packers).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Peyton Manning	QB	Tennessee
2nd	Jerome Pathon	WR	Washington
3rd	E.G. Green	WR	Florida State
4th	Steve McKinney	G	Texas A&M
5th	Antony Jordon	LB	Vanderbilt
7th	Aaron Taylor	G	Nebraska
7th	Corey Gaines	S	Tennessee

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	WR Sean Dawkins	Starter with Saints
1994	RB Marshall Faulk	Starter with Colts
	LB Trev Alberts	Out of football
1995	DT Ellis Johnson	Starter with Colts
1996	WR Marvin Harrison	Starter with Colts
1997	T Tarik Glenn	Starter with Colts

Coaching Staff

Coach: Jim Mora. **Offensive staff:** Bruce Arians (quarterbacks) • Gene Huey (running backs) • Tony Marciano (tight ends) • Tom Moore (offensive coordinator) • Howard Mudd (offensive line) • Jay Norvell (receivers). **Defensive staff:**

Greg Blanche (defensive line) • George Catavolos (defensive backs) • Mike Murphy (linebackers) • John Pagano (defensive assistant) • Rusty Tillman (defensive coordinator).
Others: Kevin Spencer (special teams) • Jon Torine (conditioning) • Tom Zupancic (strength).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 3-13 (5th in AFC East); 2-6 in division; 2-10 in conference; 2-6 at home; 1-7 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Mora's regular-season record: first season with Colts; 93-74 in 11 seasons with Saints.

Mora's postseason record: 0-4 in four appearances with Saints.

Team record past five years: 33-47 (.413, ranks 20th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1992.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*304.3	12	19
Rushing offense	*107.9	8	17
Passing offense	*196.4	10	T18
Scoring offense	313	13	20
Total defense	*303.4	5	10
Rushing defense	*127.1	13	26
Passing defense	*176.3	1	4
Scoring defense	401	12	26
Takeaways	25	T11	T22
Giveaways	28	10	T16
Turnover differential	-3	T11	T19
Sacks	37	9	T21
Sacks allowed	62	15	28

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Five wide receivers were taken in the first round of the 1996 draft. After the first two seasons, the Colts' Marvin Harrison is the valedictorian of the class:

Player, Team	'96 draft position	Rec.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Marvin Harrison, Colts	19th	137	1,702	12.4	14
Keyshawn Johnson, Jets	1st	133	1,807	13.6	13
Terry Glenn, Patriots	7th	117	1,563	13.4	8
Eddie Kennison, Rams	18th	79	1,328	16.8	9
Eric Moulds, Bills	24th	49	573	11.7	2

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	MIAMI	3:15
Sept. 13	at New England	8:20
Sept. 20	at N.Y. Jets	1:01
Sept. 27	NEW ORLEANS	12:01
Oct. 4	SAN DIEGO	12:01
Oct. 11	BUFFALO	12:01
Oct. 18	at San Francisco	1:05
Oct. 25	Open date	
Nov. 1	NEW ENGLAND	1:01
Nov. 8	at Miami	1:01
Nov. 15	N.Y. JETS	1:01
Nov. 22	at Buffalo	1:01
Nov. 29	at Baltimore	1:01
Dec. 6	at Atlanta	1:01
Dec. 13	CINCINNATI	1:01
Dec. 20	at Seattle	1:05
Dec. 27	CAROLINA	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T15TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Miami	L	10-16
Sept. 7	NEW ENGLAND	L	6-31
Sept. 14	SEATTLE	L	3-31
Sept. 21	at Buffalo	L	35-37
Sept. 28	Open date		
Oct. 5	N.Y. JETS	L	12-16
Oct. 12	at Pittsburgh	L	22-24
Oct. 20	BUFFALO	L	6-9
Oct. 26	at San Diego	L	19-35
Nov. 2	TAMPA BAY	L	28-31
Nov. 9	CINCINNATI	L	13-28
Nov. 16	GREEN BAY	W	41-38
Nov. 23	at Detroit	L	10-32
Nov. 30	at New England	L	17-20
Dec. 7	at N.Y. Jets	W	22-14
Dec. 14	MIAMI	W	41-0
Dec. 21	at Minnesota	L	28-39

Miscellaneous

Owner: James Irsay.
Stadium (capacity, surface): RCA Dome (60,599, artificial).
Ticket information: 317-297-7000.
Flagship radio station: WNDE-AM, 1260; WFBQ-FM, 94.5.
Training site: Anderson University, Anderson, Ind.; 317-649-2200.

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Faulk should get more carries this season as the Colts attempt to establish an effective running game. He also is a good receiver.

DEFENSE

LINE—Experienced talent abounds, giving hope there won't be a repeat of last year's lackluster performance (26th against the run).

Position coach Greg Blache will have the enviable problem of selecting among Tony Bennett, Dan Footman and Al Fontenot for his starting ends. Although a bit undersized at 245 pounds, Bennett is technically sound and the unit's most complete player. He missed the final 10 games of last year with a knee injury, but he should be fully recovered by training camp.

The loss of Bennett actually gave the athletic Footman a chance to emerge as a force. Footman isn't as disciplined within the scheme as Bennett, but he registered a team-high 10.5 sacks in the last 10 games. It's more of the same inside. Ellis Johnson and Bernard Whittington are the likely starters, but Tony McCoy and Steve Martin will keep them on their toes. Johnson is on the verge of stardom. He led the line-men with 69 tackles last year and had 4.5 sacks and 14 pressures.

LINEBACKERS—A one-time team strength has become a major concern. Jeff Herrod, released before the '97 season, was re-signed after playing with the Eagles last year, and the importance of his return can't be overstated. He brings inside toughness, especially against the run, and leadership that sorely was missing a year ago.

If this unit is going to hold its own, though, Quentin Coryatt must become a force on the outside. He's the team's highest-paid player, but previous coaching staffs have been unable to fully tap into his potential. Coryatt ranked second on the team with 116 tackles last year, but his impact plays were minimal—two sacks, two interceptions, two forced fumbles.

Opposite Coryatt will be Steve Morrison or Elijah Alexander. Alexander is more athletically gifted, but Morrison is an overachiever who has been tough to keep out of the lineup.

Injuries cut into the group's effectiveness last season and could do so again. Barring a late free-agent acquisition, depth must come from Bertrand Berry, Scott Von der Ahe, Myron Baker and rookie Antony Jordan, who played in a sophisticated scheme at Vanderbilt.

SECONDARY—At long last, the team's last line of defense will enter the season settled and solid.

On the corners are a pair of high-priced veterans: Jeff Burris, who left Buffalo as a free agent when the Colts dangled a five-year, \$20 million contract, and Carlton Gray, who was purchased on the open market

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	C
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	D	Secondary:	C
Receivers:	B	Special teams:	A

before last season for \$9.7 million. Both are considered competent cover men, but neither has shown the knack for coming up with high-light-material plays. Burris has six interceptions in 54 career games, including one last year. Gray has 11 picks in 68 games.

Free safety Jason Belser continues to be the playmaker of the bunch. The past two seasons, he has piled up 247 tackles and picked off six passes, both team highs, while scoring three touchdowns. Strong safety Robert Blackmon has only adequate size (6-0, 208) and speed, but possesses good coverage skills.

Safety depth could be a concern, but the team feels it has a pair of aspiring corners in Monty Montgomery and Rico Clark. Both are athletic and aggressive. Montgomery spent his rookie season as the team's nickel back and more than held his own against slot receivers.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The return game needs a swift kick in the rear end and the kicking units, primarily kicker Cary Blanchard, can ill-afford any further slippage.

After returning a punt or kickoff for a touchdown in three consecutive seasons, the Colts were extremely ordinary in 1997. Poor blocking and the lack of a true burner resulted in them ranking 21st in punt returns and 22nd in kickoff returns. The team will rely on Bailey, who carries a 23-yard career average, to revitalize the kickoff game, but Pathon could be the key to more vibrant punt returns. He averaged 11.3 yards on 38 punt returns at Washington. Another option is Burris, who holds Buffalo's career records for punt returns (100) and yardage (1,045).

If the return games return to form, the third phase of the team should be sound. Chris Gardocki has established himself as one of the league's more accomplished punters, averaging 44.5 yards on 198 kicks since joining the team three years ago. But his strength remains in positional punts; he has had just 15 touchbacks and has pinned the opposition inside the 20-yard-line 57 times while with the Colts. He finished 1997 with a 45.3-yard average.

Blanchard hit 32-of-41 field-goal attempts last season. He has booted more field goals (68) and produced more points (252) the past two seasons than any other kicker, but he was unable to bail the team out in critical situations last year when the offense faltered. Six of Blanchard's nine misses came in losses to the Dolphins, Steelers, Buccaneers and Patriots, games the Colts lost by six points or less.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The NFL gods must be Manning fans. He faces the daunting task of opening the season with three consecutive AFC East tests, but the opener against Miami is in the RCA Dome. Moreover, six of the team's first 10 games are at home and 11 games are against teams that failed to make the playoffs a year ago. The Colts close the season by playing four of their final six games on the road—but all are against non-playoff teams.

The team's 1998 fortunes likely will hinge on a three-game homestand that follows opening AFC East games against the Dolphins, Patriots and Jets. In succession, the Colts entertain the Saints, Chargers and Bills. That trio was a combined 16-32 a year ago.

BOTTOM LINE

A team that underachieved a year ago appears poised for a dramatic turnaround. Playoff contention would be a stretch, but a break-even season is within reach.

TSN

Mike Chappell covers the Colts for the Indianapolis Star/News.



Johnson's Year 3 prediction for team looks as if it will be a little off the mark

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 3rd

BY JASON COLE

The pressure is on Jimmy now.

As Jimmy Johnson enters his third season as Dolphins coach, he faces the pressure of his expectations and that of his past success. In January 1996, when Johnson joined the team, he declared in his first month on the job that he expected to get the Dolphins to the Super Bowl within three seasons. While Johnson seemingly has taken steps in that direction (making the playoffs last season after missing them in '96), several large issues remain after the Dolphins embarrassed themselves down the stretch last season.

Offensively, will the new emphasis on the running game work? Can quarterback Dan Marino learn to work in a new offense after spending nearly his entire career in a pass-first attack? And can former running backs coach Kippy Brown make a successful transition to offensive coordinator, his first time in that post anywhere?

Defensively, can the unit find the right combination of players to become championship caliber? While the Dolphins were reasonably consistent on defense most of last season, there were holes in the scheme that opponents often exploited.

Finally, how will Johnson hold up under the scrutiny of media pressure that he hasn't faced since his early years in Dallas? Johnson has been given the benefit of the doubt in nearly all football matters, though it's hard to argue he hasn't deserved it.

All of this comes together to form an intriguing set of circumstances for Johnson and his team. Beyond those issues is that Marino turns 37 in September. Finding a bunch of young players to build with was one thing; possibly replacing a Hall of Fame quarterback is a whole different issue for the Dolphins and their coach.

COACHING

Johnson may be under increased scrutiny from the media this season, but he clearly remains in control. At a time when the temptations of free agency run high, Johnson was careful not to push too hard in his pursuit of defensive linemen John Randle, Sean Gilbert and Chester McGlockton. Sure, the Dolphins could have used one and were in hot pursuit of each, finishing second in the running for all three. But Johnson knows that selling out to free agents can undercut a coach's control of his team. That is what happened to Don Shula in 1995.

Instead, Johnson has kept control and even increased it somewhat. His contract was extended a year in April, tying him to the team through 2000. That quelled rumors that Johnson might want to leave soon.

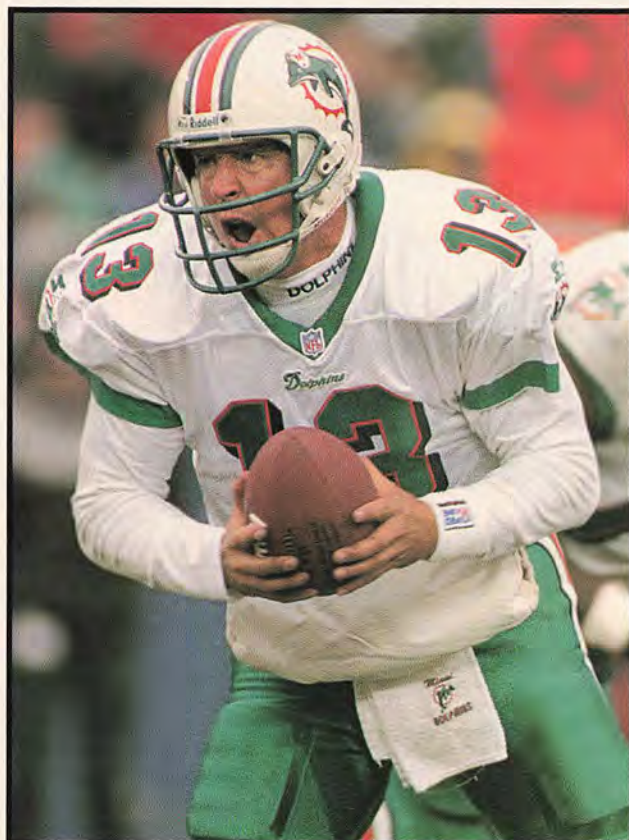
As for the rest of the staff, Brown is the most intriguing story. An accomplished running back and receiver coach with several teams, he has tremendous rapport with and gets respect from his players. But Brown's task for '98 is to change the offensive emphasis from throwing to running. The test will be if or when Marino decides to exert his desire to throw. Will a first-year offensive coordinator stand up to a 15-year veteran destined for Canton?

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Marino is coming off an awful season in which he threw 16 touchdown passes and was intercepted 11 times. And he had five interceptions returned for touchdowns during the regular season and the playoffs.

The problem? Part of it is that Marino isn't what he was. He no longer moves quickly in the pocket and he sometimes has the look of a boxer who has taken one hit too many. He completed fewer than half his passes in six games last year, a career worst for one season.

But Marino also was betrayed by his linemen, receivers and coach-



Marino is nearing career's end and is coming off a disappointing year. To be fair, though, he didn't exactly get a lot of help last season.

ing staff. The line never opened the holes to help produce a consistent running game, the receivers dropped too many passes and the coaches, particularly offensive coordinator Gary Stevens, put too much pressure on Marino to pick up the slack. That is a primary reason Stevens was fired. In the final 39 drives of the season, the Dolphins managed one touchdown, and only three drives reached an opponent's 20.

The Dolphins are in relatively good shape at the backup spot with Craig Erickson having been re-signed to a two-year deal. Erickson doesn't make many mistakes and could start for four or five teams, but he chose to stay in south Florida, where he grew up.

RUNNING BACKS—This is perhaps the most intriguing position on the team. Some positions figure to be more competitive in camp, but running back features a mix of reliability (Karim Abdul-Jabbar), potential (Lawrence Phillips) and electricity (first-round pick John Avery).

Look for some kind of committee process, particularly if Phillips makes the team. Abdul-Jabbar is the best true running back, but he lacks the fifth gear that would make him a star.

Phillips, who signed in December after being cut by St. Louis, showed some glimpses last season of being able to run between the tackles with authority. He also had a productive offseason, participating in the team's offseason conditioning program, getting his weight down and generally impressing the coaches.

Avery has unusual speed and quickness. He had 13 runs of at least 20 yards during his two years at Mississippi; the Dolphins have had just eight such runs in two seasons under Johnson.

If Johnson could somehow combine the three players, he would have a great back. Modern science having real limitations, Johnson will have to figure out the best combination or single starter after what figures to be a competitive camp.

Aside from that trio, Ray Nealy has shown some intriguing skills as a big back and Bernie Parmalee is a backup and great special teams player.

Stanley Pritchett, a receiving threat, will be the starting fullback.

RECEIVERS—As a group, this was the most disappointing position on the team in '97. Injuries decimated the unit; the Dolphins lost first-round pick Yatil Green and reserve Kirby Dar Dar for the year with a knee injuries in the first week of camp. Fred Barnett was cut, then retired when he had difficulty rebounding from knee surgery. And aside from O.J. McDuffie, these guys didn't do a good job of fighting for passes or catching the ones Marino threw. The Dolphins led the NFL in dropped passes.

Finally, the passing game became static as the season progressed because of the lack of a consistent deep threat. That was the role the Dolphins hoped Green would fill. Instead, foes blitzed constantly in long-yardage situations, forcing the receivers to break off their patterns. Because none had truly great speed, the result usually was a pass that was short of the first down.

For this season, the emphasis on the run should help and the return of Green will be a huge boost if he plays to expectations. Alas, Green was slow to recover in the offseason. Aside from Green and McDuffie, who is a reliable possession receiver, the Dolphins have an interesting group of potential reserves in Dar Dar, former running back Jerris McPhail, Brian Manning, Charles Jordan and rookie Larry Shannon.

Tight end Troy Drayton is solid, though he sometimes suffers from bouts of inconsistency.

LINE—The theme for 1998 is simple: Get nasty. To that end, the Dolphins signed free-agent right guard Kevin Donnalley, a classic tough-guy lineman who coaches say plays to the "echo of the whistle." When Donnalley was playing with the Oilers, he once got into a fight with then-teammate Lamar Lathon, an altercation that included the two players throwing weights at each other.

Three other starters are set: Richmond Webb at left tackle, Tim Ruddy at center and James Brown at right tackle. Webb, a former Pro Bowl performer, isn't mean, but with Marino at quarterback, you need a proficient pass blocker, which he is. Ruddy is a terrific player whose growth has been stunted by a series of minor injuries to his wrists, knees and ankles. He is smart and could be a gifted run blocker in the right system. Brown was the best run blocker Miami had last season, although that's hardly a big compliment.

Left guard will feature great competition between Jeff Buckley, Brent Smith and rookies Scott Shaw and Jim Bundren. If Shaw shows enough in camp, look for him to take the spot. He is nasty and strong.

DEFENSE

LINE—Before free agency began, the coaches acknowledged that a pass-rushing left end who could hold up against the run would be a huge addition. That's why they went after Randle and Gilbert, tackles who had the athletic ability to play end. The Dolphins also pursued McGlockton, hoping to pair him with Tim Bowens and move Daryl Gardener to end. When none of that panned out, the Dolphins took LSU's Kenny Mixon in the second round of the

Miami Dolphins

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
16	Dutton, John	6-4/219	9-20-75	R	Nevada	D6b/98	—
7	Erickson, Craig	6-2/210	5-17-69	7	Miami (Fla.)	FA/96	2/0
11	Huard, Damon	6-3/215	7-9-73	2	Washington	FA/97	0/0
13	Marino, Dan	6-4/228	9-15-61	16	Pittsburgh	D1/83	16/16

Running Backs

33	Abdul-Jabbar, Karim	5-10/200	6-28-74	3	UCLA	D3b/96	16/14
20	Avery, John	5-9/184	1-11-76	R	Mississippi	D1/98	—
48	Kitts, Jim (FB)	6-2/243	12-28-72	2	Ferrum (Va.)	FA/97	10/0
32	Nealy, Ray (FB)	5-11/235	4-30-75	1	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	FA/97	1/0
30	Parmalee, Bernie	5-11/210	9-16-67	7	Ball State	FA/92	16/4
21	Phillips, Lawrence	6-0/223	5-12-75	3	Nebraska	FA/97	12/9
36	Pritchett, Stanley (FB)	6-1/245	12-12-73	3	South Carolina	D4b/96	6/5

Receivers

86	Alexander, Kevin	5-9/185	1-23-75	3	Utah State	FA/98	14/8*
15	Dar Dar, Kirby	5-9/188	3-27-72	3	Syracuse	FA/95	0/0
84	Drayton, Troy (TE)	6-3/265	6-29-70	6	Penn State	T-SL/96	16/15
87	Green, Yatil	6-2/200	11-25-73	2	Miami (Fla.)	D1/97	0/0
88	Jordan, Charles	5-11/185	10-9-69	6	Long Beach (Calif.) CC	FA/96	14/1
83	Manning, Brian	5-11/188	4-22-75	2	Stanford	D6b/97	7/0
81	McDuffie, O.J.	5-10/194	12-2-69	6	Penn State	D1/93	16/16
18	McPhail, Jerris	5-11/210	6-26-72	3	East Carolina	D5a/96	14/1
89	Perry, Ed (TE)	6-4/250	9-1-74	2	James Madison	D6d/97	16/4
19	Shannon, Larry	6-4/210	2-2-75	R	East Carolina	D3b/98	—
85	Thomas, Lamar	6-1/175	2-12-70	6	Miami (Fla.)	FA/96	12/6
82	Wainright, Frank (TE)	6-3/250	10-10-67	8	Northern Colorado	FA/95	9/0

Offensive Linemen

60	Bock, John (C)	6-3/295	2-11-71	4	Indiana State	FA/96	14/3
76	Brown, James (T)	6-6/330	1-3-70	6	Virginia State	T-NYJ/96	16/16
77	Buckey, Jeff (T)	6-5/305	8-7-74	3	Stanford	D7a/96	16/12
69	Bundren, Jim (G)	6-3/303	10-6-74	R	Clemson	D7/98	—
65	Donnalley, Kevin (G)	6-5/305	6-10-68	8	North Carolina	FA/98	16/16*
61	Ruddy, Tim (C)	6-3/300	4-27-72	5	Notre Dame	D2b/94	15/15
73	Shaw, Scott (G)	6-3/303	6-2-74	R	Michigan State	D5/98	—
68	Sheldon, Mike (T)	6-4/305	6-8-73	2	Grand Valley (Mich.)	FA/97	11/0
74	Smith, Brent (G)	6-5/305	11-21-73	2	Mississippi State	D3d/97	0/0
66	Strikwerda, Nathan (C)	6-4/295	8-20-75	R	Northwestern	D6a/98	—
78	Webb, Richmond (T)	6-6/320	1-11-67	9	Texas A&M	D1/90	16/16

Defensive Linemen

90	Anderson, Dunstan (E)	6-4/270	12-31-70	2	Tulsa	FA/98	9/1*
93	Armstrong, Trace (E)	6-4/267	10-5-65	10	Florida	T-Chi/95	16/16
95	Bowens, Tim (T)	6-4/315	2-7-73	5	Mississippi	D1/94	16/16
91	Bromell, Lorenzo (E)	6-6/266	9-23-75	R	Clemson	D4/98	—
75	Burton, Shane (T)	6-6/310	1-18-74	3	Tennessee	D5b/96	16/4
70	Chalenski, Mike (E)	6-5/280	1-28-70	5	UCLA	FA/97	8/0
92	Gardener, Daryl (T)	6-6/315	2-25-73	3	Baylor	D1/96	16/16
79	Mixon, Kenny (E)	6-4/270	5-31-75	R	LSU	D2b/98	—
96	Stubbs, Daniel (E)	6-4/270	1-3-65	10	Miami (Fla.)	FA/96	1/0
72	Tanner, Barron (T)	6-3/310	9-14-73	2	Oklahoma	D5a/97	16/0
99	Taylor, Jason (E)	6-6/255	9-1-74	2	Akron	D3a/97	13/11

Linebackers

57	Brigance, O.J.	6-0/236	9-29-69	3	Rice	FA/96	16/0
56	Crawford, Mike	6-1/238	10-29-74	2	Nevada	D6c/97	7/0
51	Harris, Anthony	6-1/235	1-25-73	3	Auburn	FA/96	16/16
50	Hollier, Dwight	6-2/242	4-21-69	7	North Carolina	D4/92	16/3
53	Izzo, Larry	5-10/228	9-26-74	3	Rice	FA/96	0/0
58	Jackson, Brad	6-0/228	1-11-75	R	Cincinnati	D3a/98	—
59	Rodgers, Derrick	6-1/225	10-14-71	2	Arizona State	D3b/97	15/14
54	Thomas, Zach	5-11/235	9-1-73	3	Texas Tech	D5c/96	15/15
55	Ward, Ronnie	6-0/232	2-11-74	2	Kansas	D3c/97	4/0

Defensive Backs

27	Buckley, Terrell (CB)	5-9/180	6-7-71	7	Florida State	T-GB/95	16/16
25	Harris, Corey (CB)	5-11/205	10-25-69	7	Vanderbilt	FA/97	16/7
34	Jacobs, Tim (CB)	5-10/187	4-5-70	6	Delaware	FA/96	16/1
38	Jackson, Calvin (S)	5-9/185	10-28-72	4	Auburn	FA/95	16/16
29	Madison, Sam (CB)	5-11/185	4-23-74	2	Louisville	D2/97	14/3
31	Marion, Brock (S)	5-11/200	6-11-70	6	Nevada	FA/98	16/16*
23	Surtain, Patrick (CB)	5-11/197	5-19-76	R	Southern Miss	D2a/98	—
26	Walker, Bracey (S)	6-0/200	10-28-70	5	North Carolina	FA/97	12/0
45	Walker, Brian (S)	6-1/190	5-31-72	3	Washington State	FA/97	5/0
24	Wilson, Jerry (CB)	5-10/187	7-17-73	4	Southern	FA/96	16/0
22	Wooden, Shawn (S)	5-11/205	10-23-73	3	Notre Dame	D6/96	16/15


Specialists

17	Kidd, John (P)	6-3/214	8-22-61	15	Northwestern	FA/94	13/0
10	Mare, Olindo (K)	5-10/190	6-6-73	2	Syracuse	FA/97	16/0
8	Wilmsmeyer, Klaus (P)	6-1/210	12-4-67	6	Louisville	FA/98	0/0*

Other free agents invited to camp

Jon Baker, K; Ken Celaj, G; Nate Cochran, P; Mark Dixon, OT; Chris Fontenot, TE; Selvesta Miller, LB; Denorse Mobley, CB; Derick Shepard, DT; Antoine Simpson, DT; Landon Smith, FB; Derrick Steagall, WR; Barry Stokes, OT; Geoff Turner, WR; Randy Wheeler, G; Ray White, DT; Stan White, QB.

*—Not with Dolphins in 1997.



Miami OFFENSE

Avery
Abdul-Jabbar (RB)

Pritchett
Kitts (FB)

Green
Jordan (WR)

Webb
Buckey (LT)

Smith
Bundren (LG)

(QB) Marino
Erickson

(C) Ruddy
Bock

Donnalley
Shaw (RG)

Brown
Buckey (RT)

Drayton
Perry (TE)

McDuffie
Dar Dar (WR)

Madison
Wilson (CB)

Taylor
Stubbs (RE)

Gardener
Burton (RT)

Bowens
Tanner (LT)

Mixon
Armstrong (LE)

Buckley
Surtain (CB)

Probable starters listed on top

Rodgers
Jackson (WLB)

Marion
Jackson (FS)

Thomas
Crawford (MLB)

Wooden
Walker (SS)

A. Harris
Hollier (SLB)

Miami DEFENSE

K: Mare
P: Kidd
KR: Avery, C. Harris
PR: Avery, McDuffie

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Kevin Alexander, WR (FA/Giants); Kevin Donnalley, G (FA/Oilers); Brock Marion, S (FA/Cowboys); Klaus Wilmsmeyer, P (FA/Saints).

Key losses: Everett McIver, G (FA/Cowboys); Brett Perriman, WR (FA); Roosevelt Potts, FB (FA/Ravens); George Teague, S (FA/Cowboys).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	John Avery	RB	Mississippi
2nd	Patrick Surtain	CB	Southern Mississippi
2nd	Kenny Mixon	DE	Louisiana State
3rd	Brad Jackson	LB	Cincinnati
3rd	Larry Shannon	WR	East Carolina
4th	Lorenzo Bromell	DE	Clemson
5th	Scott Shaw	G	Michigan State
6th	Nathan Strikwerda	C	Northwestern
6th	John Dutton	QB	Nevada
7th	Jim Bundren	G	Clemson

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	WR O.J. McDuffie	Starter with Dolphins
1994	DT Tim Bowens	Starter with Dolphins
1995	OT Billy Milner	Out of football
1996	DT Daryl Gardener	Starter with Dolphins
1997	WR Yatil Green	Starter with Dolphins

Coaching Staff

Coach: Jimmy Johnson. **Offensive staff:** Larry Beightol (offensive line) • Doug Blevins (kidding) • Kippy Brown (offensive coordinator) • Joel Collier (running backs) • Robert Ford (wide receivers) • Pat Jones (tight ends) • Rich

McGeorge (assistant offensive line) • Larry Seiple (quarterbacks). **Defensive staff:** Cary Godette (defensive line) • George Hill (defensive coordinator/linebackers) • Bill Lewis (defensive nickel package) • Mel Phillips (secondary) • Randy Shannon (defensive assistant). **Others:** John Gamble (strength and conditioning) • Brad Roll (assistant strength and conditioning) • Mike Westhoff (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 9-7 (T2nd in AFC East); 4-4 in division; 8-4 in conference; 6-2 at home; 3-5 on road.

1997 playoff record: Lost to Patriots, 17-3, in wild card game.

Johnson's regular-season record: 17-15 in two seasons with Dolphins; 61-51 overall in seven seasons with Dolphins and Cowboys.

Johnson's postseason record: 0-1 in one appearance with Dolphins; 7-2 overall in four playoff appearances with Dolphins and Cowboys.

Team record last five years: 45-35 (.563, ranks T7th in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1996.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*320.3	7	11
Rushing offense	*83.9	15	29
Passing offense	*236.4	2	2
Scoring offense	339	9	13
Total defense	*335.3	13	26
Rushing defense	*113.3	11	17
Passing defense	*221.9	12	25
Scoring defense	327	8	T16
Takeaways	27	9	T17
Giveaways	20	T1	T2
Turnover differential	7	5	8
Sacks	31	T12	T27
Sacks allowed	23	2	2

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Barring injury, Dan Marino this season will become the first player to account for 400 touchdowns in an NFL career:

Player	Passing TDs	Rushing TDs	Receiving TDs	Total TDs
Dan Marino	385	8	0	393
Fran Tarkenton	342	32	0	374
John Elway	278	32	1	311
Johnny Unitas	290	13	0	303
Warren Moon	279	22	0	301

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Indianapolis	3:15
Sept. 13	BUFFALO	1:01
Sept. 20	PITTSBURGH	1:01
Sept. 27	Open date	
Oct. 4	at N.Y. Jets	1:01
Oct. 12	at Jacksonville (Mon.)	8:20
Oct. 18	ST. LOUIS	4:15
Oct. 25	NEW ENGLAND	1:01
Nov. 1	at Buffalo	1:01
Nov. 8	INDIANAPOLIS	1:01
Nov. 15	at Carolina	1:01
Nov. 23	at New England (Mon.)	8:20
Nov. 29	NEW ORLEANS	1:01
Dec. 6	at Oakland	1:15
Dec. 13	N.Y. JETS	8:20
Dec. 21	DENVER (Mon.)	8:20
Dec. 27	at Atlanta	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T27TH.

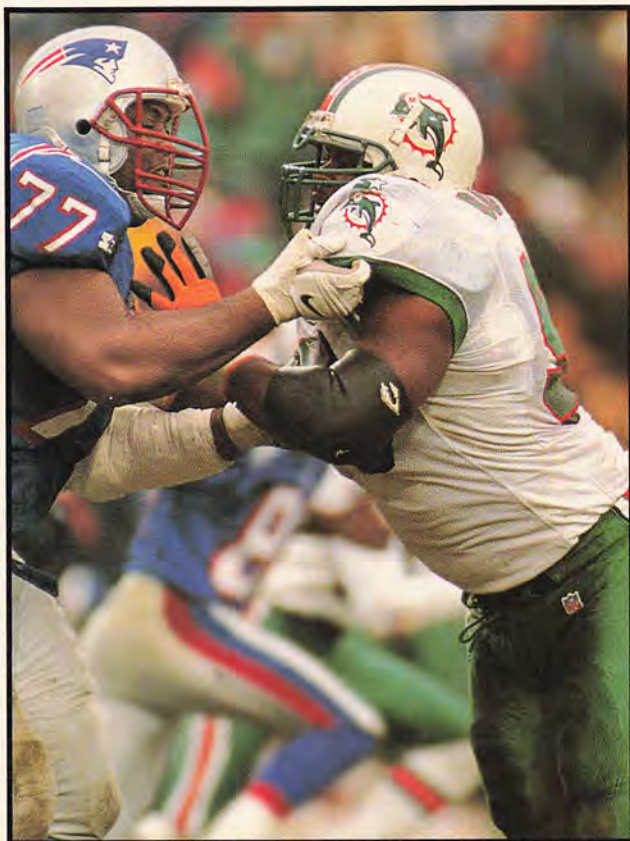
1997 Results

Aug. 31	INDIANAPOLIS	W	16-10
Sept. 7	TENNESSEE (OT)	W	16-13
Sept. 14	at Green Bay	L	18-23
Sept. 21	at Tampa Bay	L	21-31
Sept. 28	Open date		
Oct. 5	KANSAS CITY	W	17-14
Oct. 12	at N.Y. Jets	W	31-20
Oct. 19	at Baltimore	W	24-13
Oct. 27	CHICAGO (OT)	L	33-36
Nov. 2	at Buffalo	L	6-9
Nov. 9	N.Y. JETS	W	24-17
Nov. 17	BUFFALO	W	30-13
Nov. 23	at New England	L	24-27
Nov. 30	at Oakland	W	34-16
Dec. 7	DETROIT	W	33-30
Dec. 14	at Indianapolis	L	0-41
Dec. 22	NEW ENGLAND	L	12-14
Dec. 28	at New England*	L	3-17

*AFC wild-card game.

Miscellaneous

Owner: H. Wayne Huizenga.
Stadium (capacity, surface): Pro Player Stadium (75,192, grass).
Ticket information: 305-620-2578.
Flagship radio station: WQAM-AM, 560.
Training Site: Nova Southeastern University, Davie, Fla.; 954-452-7000.



Bowens has been steady, but his production really hasn't befitted that of a first-round pick. He'll be under the gun this season.

draft and Clemson's Lorenzo Bromell in the fourth.

Mixon is a good leverage player against the run who should give the Dolphins a solid first- and second-down player. He overcame a spotty college career that included three positive tests for marijuana and an eventual suspension that cost him his junior year. But Mixon came back to pay his way through his senior season and turn himself around.

If Mixon and Bromell, who is something of a project at end, work and right end Jason Taylor progresses, the Dolphins could have depth to overcome their lack of a star. Daniel Stubbs and Trace Armstrong provide solid pass-rushing skills and Shane Burton and Barron Tanner are solid backups at tackle. Then again, Stubbs or Armstrong could find their names on the waiver wire if they don't have good camps.

LINEBACKERS—The key here is finding some consistency on the strongside, where Anthony Harris played most of the time last year. Harris has the speed and strength to be outstanding, but he tends to lose concentration on a down-after-down basis. Backup Dwight Hollier is a solid pro, but he rarely makes a game-changing play.

With that in mind, the Dolphins took the University of Cincinnati's Brad Jackson, whom the coaching staff thought was the best coverage linebacker available, in the third round of the draft. Jackson is athletic, having played on the Bearcats basketball team last season. Jackson likely will back up Derrick Rodgers, coming off a fine rookie season, on the weakside.

Zach Thomas remains a terror in the middle. He had problems early in the season returning from a broken leg suffered in camp. Eventually, he returned to form. Thomas is a perfect fit for what the Dolphins like to do. With linemen expected to take on blockers, Thomas is free to roam sideline to sideline to make tackles.

SECONDARY—After another year of problems at safety, Brock Marion was brought in to shore up the deep coverage. Marion, who played for Johnson in Dallas, signed a three-year, \$8.1 million contract. He will start at free safety, where Miami used three starters last season.

At strong safety, Shawn Wooden took another step in the right direction last season by making several big plays as a second-year starter. He corrected almost all of the coverage problems he experienced in

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	A-	Defensive line:	B
Offensive backfield:	C+	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	C-	Secondary:	B
Receivers:	B	Special teams:	A-

1996, when he was moved from cornerback.

At cornerback, the Dolphins may have their best depth in years. Terrell Buckley and Sam Madison will start, with rookie Patrick Surtain in reserve. During the team's offseason minicamp, Surtain showed advanced coverage skills.

Look for the Dolphins to play more man-to-man press coverage this year. Johnson's plan is to be more aggressive and, subsequently, force more turnovers. The Dolphins had 20 interceptions in 1996 but dropped to 10 last year, when they used more conservative coverages.

SPECIAL TEAMS

With the addition of Avery, who returned two kickoffs for touchdowns at Mississippi, the Dolphins are hoping to improve their return units. While Avery didn't return a lot of punts in college, special teams coach Mike Westhoff doesn't see a problem with him doing it in the pros.

The return game certainly needs the boost. Despite the effort of Westhoff, one of the best in the league at what he does, the Dolphins haven't returned a kickoff for a score in the '90s. And they have only two punt-return touchdowns this decade, both by McDuffie in 1993.

The Dolphins sorely missed Larry Izzo and Dar Dar last season. The two combined to block or deflect five punts in 1996, but each missed the season with injuries suffered in camp.

Punter John Kidd suffered through injury problems (right leg) of his own last season, and at 36 he'll be challenged in camp by Klaus Wilmsmeyer, who last kicked for the Saints in 1996.

Rookie Olindo Mare was more than respectable on field goals and showed an outstanding leg on kickoffs last season. Mare's only problem is that Johnson doesn't like to try a lot of 40-yard-plus field goals because of the field-position dilemma. As a result, it took Mare awhile to get in a groove from that distance. With the Dolphins expected to play more low-scoring games this season, look for Mare to play a critical role.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The Dolphins play eight AFC opponents, including six division rivals, in their first nine games. With that in mind, they had better iron out their problems in camp as they make the transition to a new offense. If the Dolphins aren't sharp early, they likely won't be in control of their own destiny in the second half of the season.

Even the opener—at Indianapolis on September 6—could be difficult, since that city figures to be psyched up for what should be Peyton Manning's NFL debut.

On the flip side, four of the Dolphins' first seven games will be afternoon contests at home. September and October are months when the Florida sun can wreck opponents, and three of those four games will start at 1 p.m. The other will be at 4:15 p.m.

If the Dolphins survive the first half, the second half could be interesting with games at New England and Oakland and home games with the Jets and Denver, the first meeting with the Broncos in the regular season or playoffs since 1985. That game should feature Dan Marino against John Elway, the last remaining members of the great quarterback class of 1983.

BOTTOM LINE

This is a team that should compete for the AFC East crown and could make it to the second round of the playoffs. The Dolphins don't have any glaring holes. While they're still a key player or two from being a Super Bowl contender, they are getting closer.

TSN

Jason Cole covers the Dolphins for the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel.



It's time for Bledsoe, Patriots to prove they can move up to the elite level

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 1st

BY KEVIN MANNIX

Year One of the post-Parcells era in New England went well enough, all things considered. Under the direction of new coach Pete Carroll, the Patriots were able to smooth over some rough spots in the middle of the season and survive some injuries to key offensive players at the end to win their second consecutive AFC East title.

Now comes the real challenge for the team: establishing itself as a legitimate championship contender, one that will be an annual factor in the Super Bowl race, not just the playoff chase.

"Right now, I have to say we're still a second-tier team," quarterback Drew Bledsoe said. "We've had good records and have been to the playoffs. But we haven't been able to beat the best teams—Denver, Green Bay, Pittsburgh."

This year, more than in previous seasons, Bledsoe is the key to leading that move to the upper echelon. With running back Curtis Martin and fullback Sam Gash gone and running back David Meggett out of the picture until at least October because of injuries, the running game is in the hands of second-year man Sedrick Shaw and newcomers Robert Edwards and Tony Carter, leading to the conclusion that Bledsoe will have to be even more of a central figure in the team's desired upward move.

COACHING

When the Patriots began defense of their AFC championship a year ago, this was the area of most concern. Bill Parcells had taken his proven expertise and track record to New York, leaving the team's fortunes in the hands of Carroll, who had gained a reputation around the league mostly as an expert defensive coordinator. Parcells had coached teams to three Super Bowls; Carroll's resume included one year of experience as coach—he directed the Jets to a 6-10 record in 1994.

Despite that, Carroll proved to be effective in 1997. There were some rough spots in the middle of the season, when the team went from 4-0 to 5-4 and looked like a rudderless ship in losses to Tampa Bay and Minnesota. But Carroll turned up the pressure on his defensive philosophy to offset the lack of offense, and the Patriots won four of their last five games to successfully defend their AFC East title.

Carroll made a critical move in the offseason when he named Ernie Zampese as the new offensive coordinator. Despite the presence of Bledsoe, tight end Ben Coates and wide receiver Terry Glenn, Zampese is expected to emphasize the running game. And Zampese's quick-rhythm passing game should improve Bledsoe's numbers.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Bledsoe was selected to the Pro Bowl for the third time, but he still hasn't shown he can lead a team or respond to pressure by making big plays in crunch time. He threw a horrendous interception to Pittsburgh defensive end Kevin Henry in a loss to the Steelers that cost the Patriots a chance at home-field advantage throughout the playoffs. He also had the ball stripped from him in the final seconds of a playoff loss to the Steelers when he failed to get the team into the end zone.

This will be Bledsoe's sixth NFL season; he's entering what should be the prime of his career. He must improve his completion percentage to around 60 percent and keep the interceptions to about half the number of touchdown passes. The Henry interception notwithstanding, he did cut down on the really bad interceptions. Unfortunately, he still hasn't shown the consistency or the ability to make the game-breaking plays. The addition of Zampese and his pre-



A key for the Pats this season will be the guy taking the handoff from Bledsoe. The passing game should be OK. The ground game? Hmmm.

cision-oriented passing game should work to Bledsoe's benefit.

Behind Bledsoe is Scott Zolak, who still is an untested commodity despite being in the league for seven years. Bledsoe has been remarkably resilient, missing only one game in the past four seasons.

RUNNING BACKS—The losses of Martin and Keith Byars to the Jets and Gash to the Bills via free agency, plus the injury and off-field problems of Meggett, leave the running game in green hands. Derrick Cullors, a practice squad player in '96, has started only three games. Shaw is in his second year and didn't touch the ball as a rookie until the playoff loss to Pittsburgh. Edwards is a rookie. One of them has to be the feature back on a team that will be more reliant on the running game than it has been in the past.

Cullors was the lead back in the playoffs because of injuries to Martin and Meggett, but he isn't considered a viable long-term option as a replacement for Martin. Shaw will go into camp as the

lead back despite limited activity as a rookie in '97. Shaw is a solid player, but in the Patriots' offense, the tailback has to pass-protect as well as catch the ball coming out of the backfield. Shaw is unproven in both areas.

That's why the Patriots drafted Edwards with their No. 1 pick. He had a history of injuries at Georgia, but when he is healthy, he's a full-service back who is quick and elusive, has good hands and runs solid routes. The question will be whether he can step into linebackers to protect Bledsoe on passing plays.

Carter is the starting fullback; in Zampese's offense, the fullback's duties are to be a blocker and occasional receiver but rarely a runner. Rookie Chris Floyd also will get playing time.

RECEIVERS—This is potentially the deepest area on the offense. Glenn and Shawn Jefferson will start at receiver for the third consecutive season, with Vincent Brisby, Troy Brown, Brian Stablein and rookie speedster Tony Simmons in reserve. Coates, a perennial Pro Bowl pick, is a staple at tight end. Lovett Purnell, a quality receiver, and rookie Rod Rutledge, a blocking specialist, will compete for the backup spot.

This also is the area with the most questions. Among them: Can Glenn stay on the field after an injury-plagued '97 season in which he caught only 27 passes? Can Jefferson continue to worry teams with his deep speed? Can Brown prove his career-best '97 season was a sign that he's capable of being the No. 3 receiver on a full-time basis? Can Simmons prove that he can use his sprinter's speed on the football field and refine his pass-running skills?

Of equal importance, can Coates continue taking a pounding? He has been an every-down warrior who still is the team's clutch receiver and a security blanket for Bledsoe, but his blocking has been a detriment the past two seasons. When the team went with the power offense, he had problems handling outside linebackers.

LINE—The inactivity in this area during the offseason was something of a surprise, given the line's inability to generate much of a running game. Even with the considerable talents of Martin in the backfield, the Patriots averaged less than four yards a carry the past three seasons behind Bruce Armstrong, Max Lane, Dave Wohlabaugh and Todd Rucci. Last year, they added Zefross Moss at right tackle and shifted Lane to left guard, but the running game still finished 26th in the league in yards. The team had a chance to restructure in the offseason, when the contracts of Armstrong, Lane, Rucci and Wohlabaugh expired. But all four were re-signed.

Armstrong remains the leader of the unit and of the offense overall. He isn't as quick as he was a few years ago but still is good enough to keep Bledsoe content with the knowledge that his blindside is well-protected. Moss played last season with a bad back and still did a decent job. Lane's conversion to guard went reasonably well.

DEFENSE

LINE—There is plenty of quickness, but most of the linemen are undersized and must prove they can keep from being overrun by effective running teams. And none of the starters requires constant double-teaming in pass-rush situations, forcing the team to rely on five- and six-man rushes to apply sustained pressure. That puts even more pressure on the coverage people.

Willie McGinest is considered the defensive key. He

New England Patriots

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
11	Bledsoe, Drew	6-5/233	2-14-72	6	Washington State	D1/93	16/16
16	Zolak, Scott	6-5/235	12-13-67	8	Maryland	D4/91	4/0

Running Backs

30	Carter, Tony (FB)	5-11/236	8-23-72	4	Minnesota	FA/98	16/10*
29	Cullors, Derrick	5-11/205	12-26-72	2	Murray State	FA/96	15/1
47	Edwards, Robert	5-11/218	10-2-74	R	Georgia	D1a/98	—
37	Floyd, Chris (FB)	6-0/231	6-23-75	R	Michigan	D3a/98	—
35	Grier, Marrio	5-10/229	12-5-71	3	UT-Chattanooga	D6b/96	16/0
22	Meggett, Dave	5-7/190	4-30-66	10	Towson State	FA/95	16/2
23	Shaw, Sedrick	6-0/214	11-16-73	2	Iowa	D3a/97	1/0
44	Shaw, Harold	6-0/228	9-3-74	R	Southern Miss	D6/98	—

Receivers

86	Bartrum, Mike (TE)	6-5/245	6-23-70	5	Marshall	T-GB/96	9/0
82	Brisby, Vincent	6-3/193	1-25-71	6	Northeast Louisiana	D2c/93	16/4
80	Brown, Troy	5-10/190	7-2-71	6	Marshall	D8/93	16/6
87	Coates, Ben (TE)	6-5/245	8-16-69	8	Livingstone (N.C.)	D5/91	16/16
17	Gaiter, Tony	5-8/170	7-15-74	1	Miami (Fla.)	D6/97	1/0
88	Glenn, Terry	5-11/185	7-23-74	3	Ohio State	D1/96	9/9
84	Jefferson, Shawn	5-11/180	2-22-69	8	Central Florida	FA/96	16/14
83	Jells, Dietrich	5-10/186	4-11-72	3	Pittsburgh	W-KC/96	11/0
85	Purnell, Lovett (TE)	6-3/245	4-7-72	3	West Virginia	D7a/96	16/2
49	Rutledge, Rod (TE)	6-5/262	8-12-75	R	Alabama	D2b/98	—
15	Simmons, Tony	6-0/206	12-8-74	R	Wisconsin	D2a/98	—
81	Stablein, Brian	6-1/193	4-14-70	5	Ohio State	FA/98	16/0*

Offensive Linemen

67	Andersen, Jason (T)	6-6/312	9-3-75	R	Brigham Young	D7/98	—
78	Armstrong, Bruce (T)	6-4/295	9-7-65	12	Louisville	D1/87	16/16
61	Denson, Damon (G)	6-3/305	2-8-75	2	Michigan	D4/97	2/0
66	Ellis, Ed (T)	6-7/340	10-13-75	2	Buffalo	D4/97	1/0
63	Irwin, Heath (G)	6-4/300	6-27-73	3	Colorado	D4a/96	15/1
68	Lane, Max (T)	6-6/305	2-22-71	5	Navy	D6/94	16/16
77	Moss, Zefross (T)	6-6/325	8-17-66	10	Alabama State	FA/97	15/15
65	Porter, Juan (C)	6-3/295	11-26-73	1	Ohio State	FA/97	0/0
60	Rehberg, Scott (T)	6-8/336	11-17-73	2	Central Michigan	D7/97	6/0
71	Rucci, Todd (G)	6-5/296	7-14-70	6	Penn State	D2b/93	16/16
64	Wohlabaugh, Dave (C)	6-3/292	4-13-72	4	Syracuse	D4/95	14/14

Defensive Linemen

92	Collins, Ferric (E)	6-6/285	12-4-69	5	California	T-GB/95	6/5
90	Eaton, Chad (T)	6-5/300	4-4-72	2	Washington State	D7/95	16/1
96	Jones, Mike (E)	6-4/280	8-25-69	8	North Carolina State	FA/94	16/7
55	McGinest, Willie (E)	6-5/255	12-11-71	4	Southern California	D1/94	11/11
98	Mitchell, Brandon (T)	6-3/289	6-19-75	2	Texas A&M	D2/97	11/0
94	Rheams, Leonta (T)	6-2/280	8-1-76	R	Houston	D4/98	—
70	Smith, Artie (E)	6-5/305	5-15-70	5	Louisiana Tech	W-SF/94	0/0
91	Spires, Greg (E)	6-1/260	8-12-74	R	Florida State	D3b/98	—
74	Sullivan, Chris (E)	6-4/279	3-14-73	3	Boston College	D4b/96	16/10
95	Thomas, Henry (T)	6-2/277	1-12-65	12	LSU	FA/95	16/16
97	Wheeler, Mark (T)	6-3/285	4-1-70	7	Texas A&M	FA/96	14/14
72	Wyman, Devin (T)	6-7/290	8-29-73	3	Kentucky State	D6c/96	6/0

Linebackers

54	Bruschi, Tedy	6-1/245	6-9-73	3	Arizona	D3/96	16/1
59	Collins, Todd	6-2/248	5-27-70	6	Carson-Newman (Tenn.)	D3a/92	15/15
99	Crawford, Vernon	6-3/245	6-25-74	2	Florida State	D5/97	16/0
52	Johnson, Ted	6-3/240	12-4-72	4	Colorado	D2/95	16/16
50	Merkerson, Ron	6-2/247	8-30-75	R	Colorado	D5/98	—
58	Moore, Marty	6-1/244	3-19-71	5	Kentucky	D7/94	16/0
51	Russ, Bernard	6-0/225	11-4-73	1	West Virginia	FA/97	2/0
53	Slade, Chris	6-5/245	1-30-71	6	Virginia	D2/93	16/16

Defensive Backs

26	Canty, Chris (CB)	5-9/185	3-30-76	2	Kansas State	D1/97	16/1
42	Carter, Chris (S)	6-1/201	9-27-74	2	Texas	D3b/97	16/0
32	Clay, Willie (S)	5-10/200	9-5-70	7	Georgia Tech	FA/96	16/16
21	Israel, Steve (CB)	5-11/194	3-16-69	7	Pittsburgh	FA/97	5/0
34	Jones, Tebucky (S)	6-2/216	10-6-74	R	Syracuse	D1b/98	—
24	Law, Ty (CB)	5-11/200	2-10-74	4	Michigan	D1/95	16/16
38	Lofton, Steve (CB)	5-9/177	11-26-68	7	Texas A&M	FA/95	4/0
36	Millroy, Lawyer (S)	6-0/208	11-14-73	3	Washington	D2/96	16/16
39	Tate, Mark (CB)	6-0/185	3-20-74	1	Penn State	FA/97	0/0
25	Whigham, Larry (S)	6-2/205	6-23-72	5	Northeast Louisiana	FA/94	16/0

Specialists

19	Tupa, Tom (P)	6-4/220	2-6-66	10	Ohio State	FA/96	16/0
4	Vinatieri, Adam (K)	6-0/200	12-28-72	3	South Dakota State	FA/96	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Bob Beveridge, OT; Terry Billups, CB; Rodney Byrd, FB; Jeff Compas, SS; Matt Cox, G; Dana Cottrell, LB; Todd Doxson, WR; Scott Dragos, TE; Mike Geter, RB; Blake Irwin, OLB; Anthony Ladd, WR; Brian Lee, FS; Curtis McGee, G/T; Denis Montana, WR; Jim Murphy, QB; Kato Serwanga, CB; Brent Warren, OT.

*—Not with Patriots in 1997.



New England OFFENSE

WR Glenn Brown

RB Shaw Edwards

QB Bledsoe
(C) Wohlabaugh
Porter

FB Carter Floyd

LT Armstrong Ellis

LG Lane Irwin

C Rucci Denson

RG Moss Lane

RT Coates Purnell

TE Jefferson Simmons

WR Law Canty

CB Israel Jones

RE McGinest Spires

RT Thomas Eaton

LT Wheeler Wyman

LE Collins Sullivan

CB Law Canty

Probable starters listed on top

Collins Bruschi

Clay Carter

Johnson Moore

SS Milloy Whigham

Slade Crawford

K: Vinatieri
P: Tupa
KR: Cullors, Canty
PR: Stablein, Gaiter

New England DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Tony Carter, FB (FA/Bears); Brian Stablein, WR (FA/Colts).

Key losses: Keith Byars, FB (FA/Jets); Curtis Martin, RB (FA/Jets); Sam Gash, FB (FA/Bills); Jimmy Hitchcock, CB (trade/Vikings); Artie Smith, DT (FA/Bengals).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Robert Edwards	RB	Georgia
1st	Tebucky Jones	CB/S	Syracuse
2nd	Tony Simmons	WR	Wisconsin
2nd	Rod Rutledge	TE	Alabama
3rd	Chris Floyd	RB	Michigan
3rd	Greg Spires	DE	Florida State
4th	Leonta Rheams	DT	Houston
5th	Ron Merkerson	LB	Colorado
6th	Harold Shaw	RB	Southern Miss
7th	Jason Andersen	C	BYU

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	QB Drew Bledsoe	Starter with Patriots
1994	DE Willie McGinest	Starter with Patriots
1995	CB Ty Law	Starter with Patriots
1996	WR Terry Glenn	Starter with Patriots
1997	CB Chris Canty	Reserve with Patriots

Coaching Staff

Coach: Pete Carroll. **Offensive staff:** Paul Boudreau (offensive line) • Jeff Davidson (offensive assistant) • Jack Reilly (quarterbacks) • Carl Smith (tight ends) • Steve Walters (wide receivers) • Kirby Wilson (running backs) • Ernie

Zampese (offensive coordinator). **Defensive staff:** Ray Hamilton (defensive line) • Ron Lynn (defensive backs) • Bo Pelini (linebackers) • Steve Sidwell (defensive coordinator) • DeWayne Walker (defensive assistant). **Others:** Johnny Parker (strength and conditioning) • Dante Scarnecchia (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 10-6 (1st in AFC East); 7-1 in division; 9-3 in conference; 6-2 at home; 4-4 on road.

1997 playoff record: Defeated Dolphins, 17-3, in AFC wild card game; lost to Pittsburgh, 7-6, in divisional game.

Carroll's regular-season record: 10-6 in one season with Patriots; 16-16 overall in two seasons with Jets and Patriots.

Carroll's postseason record: 1-1 in one playoff appearance with Patriots.

Team record past five years: 42-38 (.525, ranks 11th in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1995.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*313.4	10	15
Rushing offense	*91.5	13	26
Passing offense	*221.9	5	7
Scoring offense	369	5	8
Total defense	*317.2	7	19
Rushing defense	*101	3	5
Passing defense	*216.2	T8	T21
Scoring defense	289	4	T8
Takeaways	32	3	T6
Giveaways	22	T5	T7
Turnover differential	10	T2	T4
Sacks	46	T4	T8
Sacks allowed	30	3	4

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Since 1994, no tight end has reached the end zone as often as Ben Coates:

Player, team	TD total
Ben Coates, New England	30
Shannon Sharpe, Denver	21
Wesley Walls, New Orleans-Carolina	20
Keith Jackson, Miami-Green Bay	18
Brent Jones, San Francisco	15
Tony McGee, Cincinnati	15

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 7	at Denver (Mon.)	6:20
Sept. 13	INDIANAPOLIS	8:20
Sept. 20	TENNESSEE	1:01
Sept. 27	Open date	
Oct. 4	at New Orleans	12:01
Oct. 11	KANSAS CITY	1:01
Oct. 19	N.Y. JETS (Mon.)	8:20
Oct. 25	at Miami	1:01
Nov. 1	at Indianapolis	1:01
Nov. 8	ATLANTA	1:01
Nov. 15	at Buffalo	1:01
Nov. 23	MIAMI (Mon.)	8:20
Nov. 29	BUFFALO	4:05
Dec. 6	at Pittsburgh	1:01
Dec. 13	at St. Louis	12:01
Dec. 20	SAN FRANCISCO	1:01
Dec. 27	at N.Y. Jets	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T11TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	SAN DIEGO	W	41-7
Sept. 7	at Indianapolis	W	31-6
Sept. 14	N.Y. JETS (OT)	W	27-24
Sept. 21	CHICAGO	W	31-3
Sept. 28	Open date		
Oct. 6	at Denver	L	13-34
Oct. 12	BUFFALO	W	33-6
Oct. 19	at N.Y. Jets	L	19-24
Oct. 27	GREEN BAY	L	10-28
Nov. 2	at Minnesota	L	18-23
Nov. 9	at Buffalo	W	31-10
Nov. 16	at Tampa Bay	L	7-27
Nov. 23	MIAMI	W	27-24
Nov. 30	INDIANAPOLIS	W	20-17
Dec. 7	JACKSONVILLE	W	26-20
Dec. 13	PITTSBURGH (OT)	L	21-24
Dec. 22	at Miami	W	14-12
Dec. 28	MIAMI*	W	17-3
Jan. 3	at Pittsburgh†	L	6-7

*AFC wild-card game.

†AFC divisional playoff game.

Miscellaneous

President: Robert K. Kraft.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Foxboro (60,292, grass).

Ticket information: 508-543-1776.

Flagship radio station: WBCN-FM, 104.1.

Training site: Bryant College, Smithfield, R.I.; 508-543-8200.



Slade made the Pro Bowl last season mostly for his ability to pressure the quarterback. But he also is effective against the run.

brings quickness, speed and intensity, but he needs to stay healthy to earn his hefty paycheck.

Rookie Greg Spires is expected to contribute in a relief role as the pass-rushing end, and second-year man Brandon Mitchell moves to tackle. Left end was split between Chris Sullivan and Mike Jones last season, but the return of Ferric Collons, who missed most of '97 because of a torn pectoral muscle, could be a major plus. He's the best run defender on the team and also is a solid pass rusher.

The tackles will be Henry Thomas and Mark Wheeler. Both provided leadership and an inside pass rush in '97 before wearing down. Backups Chad Eaton and Devin Wyman provide good size.

LINEBACKERS—Depth could be a problem. If any of the starters—Ted Johnson, Chris Slade or Todd Collins—is injured for any length of time, there is a major drop-off in the level of play. The primary backups are Tedy Bruschi and Vernon Crawford on the outside, and Marty Moore and rookie Ron Merkersen behind Johnson in the middle.

The primary need is a dependable coverage player to play in the middle in passing alignments, a role that Crawford could fill.

Johnson played like an all-star and controlled running games last year. He's expected to be 100 percent after having shoulder surgery in the offseason.

Slade, a Pro Bowl pick last year, is a pass-rushing linebacker who also can cover receivers in the flat and stop the run. Collins may be the best athlete among the linebackers. If he can stay healthy, he'll be a major factor against the run and pass.

SECONDARY—Carroll thinks he has the answer to his needs in first-round pick Tebucky Jones, a former running back at Syracuse who played safety a year ago in his first season as a defensive back. Carroll thinks Jones has the ability to line up in man coverage and press the receivers coming off the line every play. If Jones can make that con-

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	C
Offensive backfield:	B-	Linebackers:	B+
Offensive line:	C	Secondary:	A-
Receivers:	B+	Special teams:	B

siderable transition, he'll start with Ty Law, giving the team two quality cover corners and the ability to use the safeties more in the pass rush and run support.

If Jones can't handle the switch, he'll be back at safety, learning behind Lawyer Milloy and Willie Clay, and concentrating on making special teams contributions. If that's the case, Steve Israel will start at corner and Chris Canty will move into the picture as an extra corner in pass-defense packages. Israel has had injury problems and Canty looked out of place in coverage, even though he was a first-round pick in 1997.

Law is an aggressive corner whose physical style sometimes draws penalties but whose pass coverage and run support is impressive. Clay has excellent hands and plays as effective a center field as any free safety, making sure the deep middle is well-covered; he isn't a particularly good tackler, though. Milloy is on the verge of being a Pro Bowl safety because of his awareness and aggressive play. He finally got the chance to be a blitzer late in the season and made a number of key plays down the stretch. He's also a big-time hitter who makes receivers pay for catching passes.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Adam Vinatieri made 25-of-29 field-goal attempts last season and didn't miss any until the 10th game. In two seasons, he's 52-of-64 (81 percent), including 16-of-25 from 40 yards or more. Punter Tom Tupa averaged a career-high 45.8 yards (36.1 net).

The return area is a different story. Meggett has handled all the returns the past three seasons, but he had surgery to repair broken bones in his foot and isn't expected to be ready until October at the earliest. In his stead, the Patriots could go two ways on punt returns. They could opt for dependable hands but little explosiveness with either Brown or Stablein, or they could hand the job to Tony Gaiter, a shifty second-year man with the most elusiveness on the team but with no experience. Kick-return candidates are Canty and Cullors. Cullors had a slightly better return average—26 yards on 15 returns (one touchdown) to Meggett's 25 yards on 33 returns.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The Patriots will get a chance to see how they measure up against the league's elite right away when they open the season against the defending Super Bowl champion Broncos in Denver on *Monday Night Football*. Even if they wind up on the short end—and they *never* have beaten John Elway—they should be able to rebound and regain momentum quickly, as their next three games are against Indianapolis, Tennessee and New Orleans. There's also a bye week during that stretch, giving the Pats a good chance to start 3-1. A year ago, they were able to weather a 1-5 midseason run thanks to a 4-0 start.

If they can survive the second segment of the schedule—games vs. Kansas City, the Jets and Miami—the Patriots could really roll into the stretch. They play Indianapolis, Atlanta and Buffalo (twice) before hitting a tough final stretch against Pittsburgh, San Francisco and the Jets.

BOTTOM LINE

The players are in place. Carroll has earned their confidence, particularly on defense. If Bledsoe has a big season, the Patriots can contend for the Super Bowl. If not, they're still good enough to win a third consecutive division title.

TSN

Kevin Mannix covers the Patriots for the Boston Herald.



Makeover continues as Parcells, Jets attempt to build on last year's success

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 2nd

By Rich Cimini

The team has returned to its original logo and uniform (albeit a darker shade of green), first worn at its inception in 1963 and adorned by the Joe Namath-led Jets in Super Bowl III. Yes, even the white helmets are back.

Groovy.

"This," coach Bill Parcells said, "is the identity of the Jets."

The new threads are hip, but they can't possibly change the identity of the team any more than Parcells did last season. The Jets went from 1-15 to 9-7, coming within a few plays of making the playoffs as a wild card in one of pro football's greatest turnarounds.

Encore? That will be difficult, but not impossible. Parcells knows growing pains are inevitable (his '95 Patriots stumbled to 6-10 after a playoff year), and he acknowledges the rebuilding of the Jets "could get worse before it gets better."

Still, the Jets will be in the thick of the playoff race—unless they implode because of the looming quarterback controversy. The expensive free-agent additions of running back Curtis Martin and center Kevin Mawae will bolster the ground game, which should reduce the pressure on the steady, but limited defense.

Chances are, the Jets' postseason hopes will be determined in the regular-season finale against their blood rival, the Patriots—Tuna Bowl IV at Giants Stadium. Wouldn't it be something if the AFC East title is on the line? It would be the Jets' first division title since 1969. Parcells brought back the old uniforms. Can he bring back the old magic?

COACHING

Parcells the coach took a ragtag team and transformed it into a well-disciplined, motivated outfit. To take the next step, to elite status, the work of Parcells the general manager must start to bear fruit.

Every coach needs talent to win—even a coach as good as Parcells—and the Jets still are lacking in several areas. That will change, perhaps quickly, if most of his personnel moves pan out, particularly the signings of Martin and Mawae. If not, the Jets could be destined for mediocrity.

But say this for Parcells: He isn't afraid to make changes. By opening day, the roster will have fewer than 20 holdovers from the not-too-long-ago Rich Kotite regime.

Parcells is surrounded by a terrific staff, namely Bill Belichick and Mike Sweatman. Under Belichick, the defense cut its points allowed almost in half. The Jets surrendered 454 points in 1996 but just 287 in '97—tied for sixth-best in the NFL. Sweatman did a similarly fantastic job with the special teams, which became a team strength.

The coach on the spot is offensive coordinator Charlie Weis, who will have to integrate as many as seven new starters into the system. The only newcomer is the well-traveled Dan Henning, who replaces Ron Erhardt as the quarterback coach.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—If Neil O'Donnell is on the roster—his return, contingent upon accepting a pay cut, was up in the air as of early summer—the team will be engulfed in a season-long quarterback controversy: Glenn Foley vs. O'Donnell vs. Parcells, whose relationship with O'Donnell eroded last season.

Parcells has declared it an open competition, although it seems to be Foley's job to lose. Foley took the starting job from O'Donnell last November, but he missed the last five games with a knee injury, creating a state of chaos at the position.

Foley endeared himself to Parcells and his teammates with his gunslinger mentality. He doesn't have a cannon for an arm, but he's more instinctive than O'Donnell, who is too mechanical and takes too many sacks. The concern with Foley is his lack of durability and experience—



Johnson has had his moments, but he hasn't lived up to his selection as the No. 1 pick in the '96 draft. He needs to become a big-play guy.

only five career starts, no complete-game victories.

Despite his shortcomings, O'Donnell is a proven commodity who has the ability to be an efficient, winning quarterback, but he needs the support of a strong running game.

Ray Lucas, who impressed Parcells with his special teams ability and athleticism, will get a chance to become a full-time quarterback. Lucas has a live arm, but he's simply too raw to be a reliable backup. He could become a situational quarterback in a "Slash"-type role. Chuck Clements will carry the clipboard.

RUNNING BACKS—Parcells traded last season's starting tandem of Adrian Murrell and Lorenzo Neal, and replaced it with two of his favorite players from the Patriots, Martin and Keith Byars. Throw in a couple of promising second-year players, Leon Johnson and Jerald Sowell, and you're talking about one of the team's strongest units.

The Jets paid dearly for Martin—he cost them a six-year, \$36 million contract and first- and third-round picks in compensation to the Patriots—but he's a franchise back, one of only eight runners in NFL history to gain 1,000 yards in each of his first three seasons. Martin, presumably 100 percent after offseason surgery to repair a torn abdominal muscle, will be the offense's focal point.

Look for Sowell to start at fullback. He has great size (6-0, 248) and pass-catching ability, but he's green. If he can't handle it, the job will

go to the ageless Byars, who turns 35 in October and is one of the NFL's most prolific pass-receiving backs ever. He also can be used as a tight end, which could create matchup advantages.

Johnson, who can do a little bit of everything, will be Martin's primary backup. He should get several carries a game, lessening the load on Martin. "Tweener" Richie Anderson, a former starter, appears to be a man without a role.

RECEIVERS—Without Jeff Graham, who was traded to the Eagles, the Jets have one of the NFL's youngest receiving corps. The top four—Keyshawn Johnson, Wayne Chrebet, Alex Van Dyke and Dedric Ward—have a combined eight years of experience. The Jets also lack a consistent big-play threat, a shortcoming that will allow opposing defenses to key on Martin and the running game.

It's time for Johnson to play like the star he thinks he is. In two seasons, he has performed well but not what you would expect from the No. 1 overall pick in the 1996 draft. He has only one 100-yard game in two seasons. He did show some improvement last season, but he's far from a finished product.

Chrebet likely will win Graham's old starting job. But in three- and four-receiver sets, Chrebet will return to his customary slot position, where he has the ability to dominate on third down. The team would love to see Van Dyke, a '96 second rounder, step into a significant role, but he must increase his production. Ward brings electricity to the game, but he's too small (5-9, 180) to be an every-down receiver. Alonzo Johnson and rookie Chris Brazzell will compete for the No. 5 job.

Once again, the Jets will employ the tight end-by-committee approach, as Kyle Brady and Fred Baxter combined for 49 receptions and five touchdowns last season. Brady is a terrific blocker and an underrated receiver. Baxter has improved dramatically as a receiver. Keep an eye on rookie Blake Spence, who has a good feel for the passing game.

LINE—It's better than last season, but still loaded with questions: Can aging left tackle Jumbo Elliott, coming off Achilles' surgery, make it through an entire season? How soon before right guard Matt O'Dwyer, who has a league-wide reputation for being a penalty-prone, cheap-shot artist, incurs Parcells' wrath? Is there a right tackle in the house?

Incumbent right tackle David Williams retired in June, leaving the job to injury-plagued backup Siupeli Malamala. That could change if rookie Jason Fabini, a mashing run blocker, is as good as advertised.

The interior of the line, which collapsed as easily as a soufflé last season, will be strengthened by the addition of Mawae. He's big, strong and intense, a Pro Bowl-caliber center. The Jets also signed guard Todd Burger, a marginal starter with the Bears. He will compete with O'Dwyer and Lamont Burns at guard. Elliott, 33, still is a top-flight lineman when healthy.

For a change, the Jets have decent depth, led by center/guard Mike Gislser (another Patriots import) and tackle Kerry Jenkins.

DEFENSE

LINE—One word describes this unit: pedestrian. The Jets traded their only dynamic lineman, Hugh Douglas, leaving a group of journeymen (Rick Lyle, Ernie Logan, Bobby Hamilton and newcomer Anthony Pleasant) and unproven youngsters (Rick Terry, Jason Ferguson and rookie Dorian Boose).

But you know what? These guys won't embarrass themselves. The sacks will be scarce again—the line produced only 13½ last season, and that was with

New York Jets

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
7	Clements, Chuck	6-3/214	9-29-73	2	Houston	D6b/97	1/0
4	Foley, Glenn	6-2/210	10-10-70	5	Boston College	D7/94	6/2
6	Lucas, Ray	6-3/201	8-6-72	2	Rutgers	FA/97	5/0
14	O'Donnell, Neil	6-3/228	7-3-66	9	Maryland	FA/96	15/14

Running Backs

20	Anderson, Richie	6-2/225	9-13-71	6	Penn State	D6/93	16/3
41	Byars, Keith (FB)	6-1/255	10-14-63	13	Ohio State	FA/98	16/8*
35	Johnson, Dustin (FB)	6-2/236	8-5-73	R	Brigham Young	D6c/98	—
32	Johnson, Leon	6-0/215	7-13-74	2	North Carolina	D4b/97	16/1
28	Martin, Curtis	5-11/203	5-1-73	4	Pittsburgh	FA/98	13/13*
33	Sowell, Jerald (FB)	6-0/248	1-21-74	2	Tulane	D7a/97	9/0

Receivers

84	Baxter, Fred (TE)	6-3/265	6-14-71	6	Auburn	D5a/93	16/9
88	Brady, Kyle (TE)	6-6/268	1-14-72	4	Penn State	D1a/95	16/14
87	Brazzell, Chris	6-2/182	5-22-76	R	Angelo State (Texas)	D6b/98	—
80	Chrebet, Wayne	5-10/185	8-14-73	4	Hofstra	FA/95	16/1
83	Hart, Lawrence (TE)	6-4/261	9-19-76	R	Southern	D7/98	—
85	Johnson, Alonzo	5-11/186	4-18-73	1	Central State (Ohio)	FA/97	0/0
19	Johnson, Keyshawn	6-3/210	7-22-72	3	USC	D1/96	16/16
82	Spence, Blake (TE)	6-4/249	6-20-75	R	Oregon	D5c/98	—
86	Van Dyke, Alex	6-0/200	7-24-74	3	Nevada	D2/96	5/0
89	Ward, Dedric	5-9/180	9-29-74	2	Northern Iowa	D3/97	11/1

Offensive Linemen

74	Bateman, Eric (G)	6-7/319	12-28-73	R	Brigham Young	D5d/98	—
62	Burger, Todd (G)	6-3/303	3-20-70	5	Penn State	FA/98	15/15*
63	Burns, Lamont (G)	6-4/300	3-16-74	2	East Carolina	D5a/97	4/3
64	Conrad, J.R. (T)	6-4/300	2-2-74	2	Oklahoma	FA/97	12/1
76	Elliott, Jumbo (T)	6-7/308	4-1-65	11	Michigan	FA/96	13/13
69	Fabini, Jason (T)	6-7/318	8-25-74	R	Cincinnati	D4/98	—
67	Gislser, Mike (G)	6-4/295	8-26-69	6	Houston	FA/98	16/2*
77	Hagood, Jay (T)	6-4/306	8-9-73	2	Virginia Tech	FA/97	2/0
65	Hudson, John (C)	6-2/270	1-29-68	9	Auburn	FA/96	16/0
71	Jenkins, Kerry (T)	6-5/310	9-6-73	2	Troy State	FA/97	2/2
60	Karczewski, Doug (G)	6-5/298	2-6-75	R	Virginia	D5b/98	0/0
75	Malamala, Siupeli (G)	6-5/305	1-15-69	7	Washington	D3/92	10/5
68	Mawae, Kevin (C)	6-4/305	1-23-71	5	LSU	FA/98	16/16*
70	O'Dwyer, Matt (G)	6-5/300	9-1-72	4	Northwestern	D2/95	16/16
66	Palelele, Lonnie (G)	6-3/315	10-15-70	3	UNLV	FA/97	15/14

Defensive Linemen

97	Boose, Dorian (E)	6-5/283	1-29-74	R	Washington State	D2/98	—
78	Day, Terry (E)	6-4/280	9-18-74	2	Mississippi State	D4a/97	1/0
91	Dixon, Ronnie (T)	6-3/310	5-10-71	5	Cincinnati	FA/97	6/3
92	Ferguson, Jason (T)	6-3/300	11-28-74	2	Georgia	D7b/97	13/1
51	Finkes, Matt (E)	6-3/260	2-12-75	2	Ohio State	D6/97	8/0
92	Hamilton, Bobby (E)	6-5/280	1-7-71	3	Southern Miss	FA/96	16/0
76	Keneley, Matt (T)	6-4/286	12-1-73	1	USC	D7/97	0/0
93	Logan, Ernie (E)	6-3/290	5-18-68	7	East Carolina	FA/97	15/14
95	Lyle, Rick (E/T)	6-5/285	2-26-71	4	Missouri	FA/97	16/16
99	Ogobogu, Eric (E)	6-4/266	7-18-75	R	Maryland	D6a/98	—
98	Pleasant, Anthony (E)	6-5/280	1-27-68	9	Tennessee State	FA/98	11/0*
94	Terry, Rick (T)	6-4/302	4-5-74	2	North Carolina	D2/97	14/0

Linebackers

53	Cascadden, Chad	6-1/240	5-14-72	4	Wisconsin	FA/95	15/0
49	Dailey, Casey	6-3/249	6-11-75	R	Northwestern	D5a/98	—
58	Farrior, James	6-2/240	1-6-75	2	Virginia	D1/97	16/15
54	Gordon, Dwayne	6-1/240	11-2-69	5	New Hampshire	FA/97	16/8
50	Guest, Craig	6-1/242	12-10-75	1	Buffalo	FA/97	0/0
52	Johnson, Pepper	6-3/259	7-29-64	13	Ohio State	FA/97	8/8
55	Jones, Marvin	6-2/244	6-28-72	6	Florida State	D1/93	16/16
57	Lewis, Mo	6-3/258	10-21-69	8	Georgia	D3/91	16/16

Defensive Backs

25	Austin, Raymond (S)	5-11/190	12-21-74	2	Tennessee	D5b/97	16/0
44	Brown, Corwin (S)	6-1/200	4-25-70	6	Michigan	FA/97	16/0
42	Coleman, Marcus (S)	6-2/210	5-24-74	3	Texas Tech	D5/96	16/2
47	Frost, Scott (S)	6-3/219	1-4-75	R	Nebraska	D3a/98	—
31	Glenn, Aaron (CB)	5-9/185	7-16-72	5	Texas A&M	D1/94	16/16
21	Green, Victor (S)	5-11/205	12-8-69	6	Akron	FA/93	16/16
30	Hayes, Chris (S)	6-0/200	5-7-72	2	Washington State	D7/96	16/0
26	Henderson, Jerome (CB)	5-10/200	8-8-69	8	Clemson	FA/97	16/14
36	Marshall, Anthony (S)	6-1/212	9-16-70	4	LSU	D/97	14/1
24	Mickens, Ray (CB)	5-8/180	1-4-73	3	Texas A&M	D3/96	16/0
45	Smith, Otis (CB)	5-11/190	10-22-65	8	Missouri	FA/97	16/16
23	Williams, Kevin (CB)	6-0/190	8-4-75	R	Oklahoma State	D3b/98	—

Specialists

3	Gallery, Nick (P)	6-4/239	2-15-75	1	Iowa	FA/97	0/0
9	Hall, John (K)	6-3/223	3-17-74	2	Wisconsin	FA/97	16/0
11	Hansen, Brian (P)	6-4/215	10-26-60	14	Sioux Falls (S.D.)	FA/97	15/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Geno Bell, DT; Shannon Brown, DT; Rob Deignan, P; Cedric Donaldson, CB; Robert Farmer, RB; Ed Gibson, CB; Bernard Holmes, WR; Nakia Jenkins, WR; Keith Lozowski, FB; John Munch, LB; Brian Musso, WR/KR; Deron Thorp, OT; David Viger, DT; Chris Wing, LB.

*—Not with Jets in 1997.

New York OFFENSE

Martin L. Johnson
 RB

(QB) Foley O'Donnell
 (C) **Mawae Gisler**

Sowell Byars
 FB

Brady Baxter
 TE

K. Johnson Ward
 WR

Chrebet Van Dyke
 WR

Elliott Jenkins
 LT

Burger Burns
 LG

O'Dwyer Burger
 C

Malamala Fabini
 RG

Brady Baxter
 RT

New York DEFENSE

Glenn Mickens
 CB

Pleasant Hamilton
 RE

Logan Terry
 RT

Ferguson Lyle
 LT

Lyle Boose
 LE

Smith Coleman
 CB

Farrior Cascadden
 WLB

Jones P. Johnson
 MLB

Lewis Cascadden
 SLB

Austin Frost
 FS

Green Hayes
 SS

Probable starters listed on top

New York DEFENSE

K: Hall
P: Hansen
KR: Glenn, L. Johnson
PR: L. Johnson, Ward

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Todd Burger, G (FA/Bears); Keith Byars, FB (FA/Patriots); Mike Gisler, C/G (FA/Patriots); Curtis Martin, RB (FA/Patriots); Kevin Mawae, C (FA/Seahawks); Anthony Pleasant, DE (released/Falcons).

Key losses: John Burke, TE (FA/Chargers); Roger Duffy, C (FA/Steelers); Hugh Douglas, DE (trade/Eagles); Jeff Graham, WR (trade/Eagles); Adrian Murrell, RB (trade/Cardinals); Lorenzo Neal, FB (trade/Buccaneers); William Roberts, G (FA); David Williams, OT (expected to retire).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
2nd	Dorian Boose	DE	Washington State
3rd	Scott Frost	S	Nebraska
3rd	Kevin Williams	CB/S	Oklahoma State
4th	Jason Fabini	T	Cincinnati
5th	Casey Dailey	LB	Northwestern
5th	Doug Karczewski	G	Virginia
5th	Blake Spence	TE	Oregon
5th	Eric Bateman	G	Brigham Young
6th	Eric Ogbogu	DE	Maryland
6th	Chris Brazzell	WR	Angelo (Texas) State
6th	Dustin Johnson	RB	Brigham Young
7th	Lawrence Hart	TE	Southern

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	LB Marvin Jones	Starter with Jets
1994	CB Aaron Glenn	Starter with Jets
1995	TE Kyle Brady	Starter with Jets
	DE Hugh Douglas	Starter with Eagles
1996	WR Keyshawn Johnson	Starter with Jets
1997	LB James Farrior	Starter with Jets

Coaching Staff

Coach: Bill Parcells. Offensive staff: Maurice Carthon (run-

ning backs) • Todd Haley (offensive assistant/quality control) • Dan Henning (quarterbacks) • Bill Muir (offensive line) • Charlie Weis (offensive coordinator/wide receivers).

Defensive staff: Bill Belichick (assistant head coach/defensive backs) • Romeo Crennel (defensive line) • Al Groh (linebackers) • Eric Mangini (defensive assistant/quality control).

Others: John Lott (strength and conditioning) • Mike Sweatman (special teams) • Josh Zitomer (strength and conditioning assistant).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 9-7 (T2nd in AFC East); 2-6 in division; 6-6 in conference; 5-3 at home; 4-4 on road.

1997 postseason record: None.

Parcells' regular-season record: 9-7 in one season with Jets; 118-88-1 overall in 13 seasons with Jets, Patriots and Giants.

Parcells' postseason record: 10-5 in seven appearances with Patriots and Giants (2-1 in Super Bowls).

Team record past five years: 27-53 (.338, ranks T26th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1991.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*295.4	13	22
Rushing offense	*92.8	12	25
Passing offense	*202.6	9	T15
Scoring offense	348	8	12
Total defense	*332.5	11	24
Rushing defense	*118.7	12	21
Passing defense	*213.8	7	19
Scoring defense	287	T2	T6
Takeaways	25	T11	T22
Giveaways	22	T5	T7
Turnover differential	3	7	T12
Sacks	29	14	29
Sacks allowed	48	12	23

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

The Jets' eight-game turnaround last season is matched or exceeded by only six other teams in NFL history:

Year, team	Record	Coach	Previous season	Gain
1929, Giants	13-1-1	LeRoy Andrews*	4-7-2	+9
1963, Raiders	10-4	Al Davis*	1-13	+9
1997, Jets	9-7	Bill Parcells*	1-15	+8
1992, Colts	9-7	Ted Marchibroda*	1-15	+8
1988, Bengals	12-4	Sam Wyche	4-11	+8
1976, Patriots	11-3	Chuck Fairbanks	3-11	+8
1975, Colts	10-4	Ted Marchibroda*	2-12	+8

*First season as coach

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at San Francisco	1:15
Sept. 13	BALTIMORE	1:01
Sept. 20	INDIANAPOLIS	1:01
Sept. 27	Open date	
Oct. 4	MIAMI	1:01
Oct. 11	at St. Louis	3:15
Oct. 19	at New England (Mon.)	8:20
Oct. 25	ATLANTA	1:01
Nov. 1	at Kansas City	3:05
Nov. 8	BUFFALO	4:15
Nov. 15	at Indianapolis	1:01
Nov. 22	at Tennessee	3:15
Nov. 29	CAROLINA	1:01
Dec. 6	SEATTLE	1:01
Dec. 13	at Miami	8:20
Dec. 19	at Buffalo (Sat.)	12:35
Dec. 27	NEW ENGLAND	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T20TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Seattle	W	41-3
Sept. 7	BUFFALO	L	22-28
Sept. 14	at New England (OT)	L	24-27
Sept. 21	OAKLAND	W	23-22
Sept. 28	at Cincinnati	W	31-14
Oct. 5	at Indianapolis	W	16-12
Oct. 12	MIAMI	L	20-31
Oct. 19	NEW ENGLAND	W	24-19
Oct. 26	Open date		
Nov. 2	BALTIMORE (OT)	W	19-16
Nov. 9	at Miami	L	17-24
Nov. 16	at Chicago	W	23-15
Nov. 23	MINNESOTA	W	23-21
Nov. 30	at Buffalo	L	10-20
Dec. 7	INDIANAPOLIS	L	14-22
Dec. 14	TAMPA BAY	W	31-0
Dec. 21	at Detroit	L	10-13

Miscellaneous

Chairman: Leon Hess.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Giants (77,716, artificial).

Ticket information: 516-560-8200.

Flagship radio station: WFAN-AM, 660.

Training site: Hofstra University, Hempstead, N.Y.; 516-560-8100.

64 TSN • 1998 PRO FOOTBALL

GRAPHIC BY MIKE NYERGES / TSN



Glenn, a sticky cover man, is the Jets' best defensive player and is coming off a Pro Bowl appearance. The other corner is the problem.

Douglas—but this group of try-hard, blue-collar types should be stubborn against the run.

A lot depends on the progress of Terry and Ferguson, both second-year players who could wind up starting at tackle in Belichick's 4-3 scheme. The 3-4 alignment has been laid to rest for the time being. The starting ends probably will be Pleasant, coming off two injury-marred seasons, and Lyle, who will be challenged by Boose on the left side. Logan can start inside or outside.

Terry Day, who was being counted on as a situational pass rusher, blew out a knee in a basketball game and probably will be lost for the season. A wild card is rookie Eric Ogbogu, who flashed some pass-rushing ability at Maryland. Look for Belichick to rotate seven or eight bodies to keep everyone fresh.

LINEBACKERS—The Mo Lewis-Marvin Jones-James Farrior troika makes this the team's strongest unit. So strong that it wouldn't be a shock for them to employ a 3-4 scheme at times, with either graybeard Pepper Johnson or dependable Dwayne Gordon stepping in at one of the inside slots.

Farrior, a '97 first-rounder, will be expected to make considerable improvement. He had a so-so rookie season, running out of gas in the home stretch. The 4-3 scheme should benefit Farrior, who has the speed to excel on the weakside.

Lewis, coming off an impressive bounce-back season, could have expanded duties. With the front four hurting for pass rushers, Lewis, who posted a team-high eight sacks last season, could be asked to fill the void in a specialized role.

Jones returns to his familiar slot in the middle and will be asked to quarterback the defense. The key for Jones, as always, is staying healthy, which he did last season for the first time in his career.

The Jets have solid depth, with Johnson, Gordon and Chad Cascadden, who could see time as a situational pass rusher. Rookie Casey Dailey also will compete for playing time as a third-down rusher.

SECONDARY—This is the home of the Jets' best defensive player, Pro Bowl cornerback Aaron Glenn, one of the NFL's best cover men. It also is the home of their most enigmatic player, cornerback Otis Smith, who specializes in big plays—positive and negative. Smith was burned for nine touchdowns last season, but he also intercepted a

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	A	Defensive line:	D+
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	C	Secondary:	C-
Receivers:	B-	Special teams:	B

team-high six passes, three of which he returned for touchdowns.

The Jets want more consistency at the right corner, but they will have to live with Smith unless Marcus Coleman wins the job. Coleman, a washout at safety, has the physical tools, but he has failed to grasp the cerebral aspect of the game. Underrated Ray Mickens would like a crack at the job, but he's too small (5-8, 180) for Parcells' liking. He wants Mickens to remain the nickel back, where he effectively blankets slot receivers.

Free safety is a problem area. The Jets are eager to replace journeyman Jerome Henderson, but the heir apparent—rookie Scott Frost—could be a year away. Frost, who played quarterback at Nebraska, has minimal experience at safety. He has the brains, athletic ability and toughness to be a big-time safety, but these kind of projections are hard to predict. Raymond Austin could emerge as the starter. The strong safety is Victor Green, a hard-hitting, emotional player who must do a better job of maintaining his poise. The Jets would like someone with better pass-coverage skills, but they don't have anyone who fits that bill.

There will be plenty of competition for backup roles, with Austin, Anthony Marshall, Chris Hayes and Corwin Brown involved in the mix. Watch rookie safety/cornerback Kevin Williams, who could see time in substitution defenses.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The group played a large role in last season's turnaround, and there's no reason to expect anything less in '98. Glenn and Leon Johnson are among the league's premier kick and punt returners, respectively, and second-year kicker John Hall is a weapon because of his booming kick-offs—he set an NFL record with 29 touchbacks. The coverage units are led by Chris Hayes and Brown, two of the best in the business.

Now for the concerns: Hall, he of the bionic leg, must improve his accuracy. He converted only 68 percent of his field-goal attempts (second-worst in the AFC), unacceptable for a team that figures to be involved in many close games. This year, Parcells will be less tolerant of Hall's miscues. If he has a shaky preseason, the Jets could sign a veteran kicker, relegating Hall to the role of kickoff specialist.

The punting situation is unsettled, with 37-year-old incumbent Brian Hansen trying to stave off a challenge from Nick Gallery, who spent last season on the practice squad. Parcells is looking for a young leg. The job is there for the taking.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The early portion is enticing. Barring a disastrous start, the Jets should be 3-2 or 4-1 as they head into the October 19 Monday night showdown in New England—the Jets' first Monday game in six seasons.

After a difficult opener in San Francisco, the Jets are home for a month, facing the Ravens, Colts and Dolphins, with a bye before the Miami game. The Ravens and Colts will be starting new quarterbacks, which should work in the Jets' favor.

If the Jets fail to capitalize on the cushy September schedule, they could be hard-pressed to make the playoffs. They face the prospect of a brutal November/December, with the Chiefs, Oilers and Dolphins on the road and the Panthers and Seahawks at home—all teams that should be in contention for the playoffs.

BOTTOM LINE

With a shortage of speed on offense and an alarming dearth of pass rushers on defense, the Jets won't instill fear in many opponents. But they still have the components to be a winning team—a franchise-caliber running back in Martin; a steady, well-disciplined defense; dynamic special teams; and, of course, strong coaching.

TSN

Rich Cimini covers the Jets for the New York Daily News.



Bruising back Corey Dillon makes a quick mark in Cincinnati

When he left the University of Washington after his junior year and declared for the NFL draft, Corey Dillon was a mystery man with a troubled past, a bad-guy image—but all the football talent in the world.

Now? He may be the second coming of Jim Brown. Well, perhaps that's a little strong, but a piece of Dillon's uniform already resides where Brown is enshrined—in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

His No. 28 Bengals jersey was sent to Canton after he rushed 39 times for a rookie-record 246 yards and four touchdowns in a 41-14 victory over the Oilers on December 4. Dillon, a 6-1, 220-pounder, shattered Brown's 40-year-old mark (237 yards against the Los Angeles Rams on November 24, 1957) with the fifth-highest single-game performance in NFL history, behind Walter Payton (275), O.J. Simpson (273 and 250) and Willie Ellison (247).

And violins don't play when Dillon—who has tattoos on both arms, including one of the Grim Reaper and one of a nude woman—carries the ball. He's pure percussion. "He is really a strong, big back who's hard to tackle," says Steve Szabo, the Jaguars' inside linebackers coach. "He's got real good speed—more speed than you originally think he had. ... You know you're going to have to tackle well to play the guy because if you're a sloppy tackling team, this guy is going to hurt you."

Dillon used his rare blend of speed and power to lead all rookie rushers last season with 1,129 yards and was rewarded by being named AFC Rookie of the Year by the NFL Players Association. An impressive feat when you consider he got only 39 total carries the first eight games after being drafted as insurance for oft-injured Ki-Jana Carter.

"I'm just a hard-nose player," says Dillon, who does

ager from a single-parent home who grew up on the streets of Seattle, Dillon was charged in nine separate cases with crimes ranging from assault to obstructing a police officer. He bounced from junior college (Edmonds CC in Lynnwood, Wash., in 1993) to junior college (Garden City, Kan., JC in 1994) to junior college (Dixie College in St. George, Utah, in 1995) before finally landing at Washington, where he rushed for school records of 1,555 yards and 22 touchdowns in 1996.

When Dillon still was available in the '97 draft, Bengals president Mike Brown asked running backs coach Jim Anderson for an evaluation. Anderson gave his assessment, then turned to special teams coach Al Roberts and said, "Al coached him [at Washington]."

Roberts didn't hesitate: "Take him."

Bengals coach Bruce Coslet says Dillon would've played earlier last season had he not had trouble blocking and picking up the blitz. "I read all the hindsight articles, and I would've loved to have put him in there, a big powerful running back like that," Coslet says. "But if you don't know who to block when we throw and the quarterback gets killed, then you don't need to be in there. He's come a long ways."

Now that Dillon has those techniques down, inquiring minds in the NFL want to know: Is he destined for superstardom or is he a one-year wonder? Insisting his problems are in the past, Dillon's desire will determine his staying power. "He almost runs the ball like he refuses to be tackled," says Jim Lippincott, the Bengals' director of pro and college personnel. "He has some very natural line-of-scrimmage vision where he sees openings and can cut both inside and outside."

That vision is key to Dillon's use as an every-down back, except in third-and-long situations, when Eric Bieniemy excels as a runner and receiver in a spread for-

Rush job

200 pushups and 200 situps each night. "Contact—I love it. I try to combine my skills, power and speed. And I challenge any defender. I'm not scared of flying into a couple of guys. That's how I play. Why change?"

"This is the type of sport where you hit or be hit. I'd rather hit you before you hit me. That's the name of the game. You've got to be physical out there or you're going to lose."

So why did each NFL team pass on Dillon at least once before the Bengals grabbed him with the 43rd overall pick in the second round of the '97 draft? As a teen-

mation. Carter remains the goal-line specialist, but Dillon will get his share of scoring opportunities. Carter also will spell Dillon when he needs a rest—which isn't often.

"When he carries the ball, he just seems to carry your team," Lippincott says of Dillon. "And he's strong—very strong. The biggest improvement that he made was ball security. In college, that was something that was noticeable. Here, his ball security was much better."

The proof is in Canton.

TSN

Chick Ludwig covers the Bengals for the Dayton (Ohio) Daily News.

BUILDING ON ROOKIE SUCCESS

Chapter 2

STORY BY CHICK LUDWIG
PHOTO BY ALBERT DICKSON / TSN



New stadium, new offense highlight Ravens' many changes this season

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 5th

BY MIKE PRESTON

Ted Marchibroda became the oldest coach in the NFL after Marv Levy's retirement, but one has to wonder how long Marchibroda, 67, will hold the title.

The Ravens' two-year honeymoon in Baltimore gradually is coming to an end as the team moves into a new \$220 million publicly funded stadium this season. And if that isn't pressure enough, owner Art Modell is promising an elite team this season.

Marchibroda, entering the final year of a three-year contract, has no immediate plans to retire, so the scenario is a fairly simple one: Contend for a playoff spot until the final month of the season—or find employment elsewhere.

"I've been around long enough to realize that you can't worry about those kind of things; they work themselves out," said Marchibroda, whose first two Ravens teams finished a combined 10-21-1. "This turned out to be a longer rebuilding process than I expected, but I've been through this kind of thing before."

Marchibroda rebuilt the old Baltimore Colts into a playoff team in the mid-1970s and was in the final year of a three-year contract when he led Indianapolis within a Hail Mary pass of the Super Bowl three years ago. So the old coach has experience in these matters.

COACHING

Marchibroda's style won't change. He is as vanilla as the ice cream he often eats between training camp practice sessions. He drives a big American-made car, wears a lot of polyester pants and seldom says anything derogatory about a player in public. But Marchibroda demands a strong work ethic from his players and they generally respect him.

A case in point: On November 30, the Ravens trailed the Jaguars, 29-14, with 9:04 left, and they easily could have folded and taken the next flight home. Starting quarterback Vinny Testaverde had left the game in the second quarter with a knee injury and hopes appeared dim. Instead, backup quarterback Eric Zeier led the team to two touchdowns in the final quarter. Jacksonville still won the game, but the Ravens went on to win two of their last three games, possibly setting the tone for this season.

"Ted weeds out the players he doesn't want, then he brings in his type of players," defensive tackle Tony Siragusa said. "Ted's kind of players don't quit. We've got enough of them now. It's time to make the playoff run."

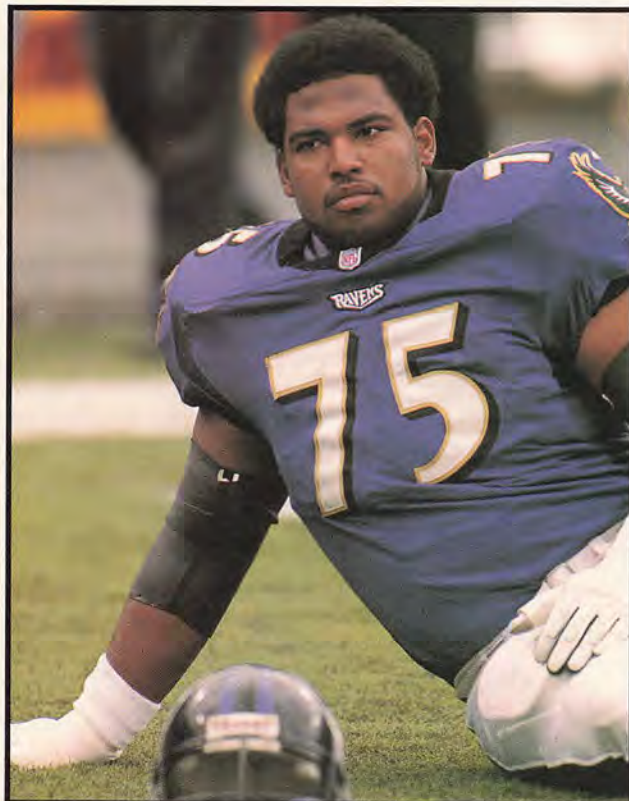
Marchibroda's offensive philosophy will change this season as the Ravens go from using a pass-oriented, one-back set to a two-back formation with an emphasis on running.

The team has a capable offensive staff, but there are questions nonetheless. For instance, who calls the plays? Is it quarterback coach Don Strock or assistant head coach/offense coach Kirk Ferentz? Marchibroda prefers a coaching-by-committee approach, which may have caused some confusion last year when the Ravens started out as a passing team and tried to convert to a run offense as the season wore on.

Defensively, Marvin Lewis is a bright, young coordinator who loves to gamble. He'll call more blitzes this season, but his biggest improvement during the past two seasons has been his rapport with the players. The Ravens have a strong, technical defensive line coach in Jacob Burney but need to get more contributions and input from linebackers coach Maxie Baughan and secondary coach Alvin Reynolds.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACK—Hello, Jim Harbaugh. Goodbye, Vinny Testaverde.



The Ravens' offensive line is one of the biggest in football, and Ogden is the leader. That group needs to play at a higher level this season.

Harbaugh, obtained in a trade with the Colts, doesn't have nearly the arm strength of Testaverde, but the Ravens are hoping he will win games in the fourth quarter with sound play-calling, toughness and a take-charge attitude in the huddle.

Because the team is expected to have a diversified attack and Harbaugh is more mobile than Testaverde, the Ravens will use more sprint and rollout passes. Harbaugh isn't much of a deep threat anymore, so the Ravens may throw more short and intermediate passes. Harbaugh really can't carry a team, but with an adequate running game, he can take this one to the playoffs.

If Harbaugh falters, Marchibroda has the luxury of bringing fourth-year man Eric Zeier off the bench. Zeier surprised some people, including the coaching staff, with his arm strength last season. He is agile, can throw the long ball and can make big plays on the run. He's a carbon copy of Harbaugh but with a stronger arm and less experience. Zeier won't be the No. 1 quarterback when the season opens, but he'll push Harbaugh all season. Zeier has become a fan favorite in Baltimore, so the switch won't be as difficult as last year, when Marchibroda was reluctant to bench Testaverde.

RUNNING BACKS—The biggest problem with the Ravens' running game last year was Bam Morris, who spent more time in a Texas jail during the offseason than he did on the field in two years in Baltimore. But in Errict Rhett, acquired from the Bucs in an off-season trade, the Ravens finally have a dependable No. 1 running back. Rhett is a tireless worker, the kind of runner Marchibroda had in the past with Lydell Mitchell and Thurman Thomas. Rhett is a

two-time 1,000-yard rusher who should have fresh legs after spending last season in Tampa Bay backing up Warrick Dunn. He is neither flashy nor exceptionally fast, just steady and reliable, and he could reach 1,000 yards for the third time.

Rhett will have competition from second-year player Jay Graham, who should be a nice complement with his power and ability to run outside. Graham can score from anywhere on the field. His major problem last year was an ankle injury that sidelined him for most of the second half of the season. If he stays healthy, the Ravens will be solid at running back.

There are questions at fullback. Roosevelt Potts played little with the Colts and Dolphins last season after missing the previous season because he violated the league's substance-abuse policy. When he is at the top of his game, Potts is one of the best blockers in the league. If he keeps his weight down to the 250-260 level and remains trouble-free, he'll have success inside the red zone as a blocker and runner. If Potts disappoints, the Ravens basically become a one-back team again because Kenyon Cotton had only limited action last year and still hasn't shown great explosion at the point of attack.

RECEIVERS—This is a group with an identity crisis. In the past three seasons, there were certain things you could count on: death, taxes and Michael Jackson teaming with Derrick Alexander at the outside positions. Alexander now resides in Kansas City, and Jackson may have to find a new home if he doesn't return to his 1996 form, when he was one of the best in the league.

In his defense, Jackson was bothered by several nagging injuries last season. But he also had trouble adjusting when the Ravens became more of a running team. This year, it's his show with Alexander off the stage. Jermaine Lewis, a terrific punt returner, will move from the slot to the other outside position in a bid to become a full-time receiver.

If the Jackson-Lewis duo meshes, the Ravens could have one of the better receiving tandems in the AFC. Mix in rookie Pat Johnson, who will get time in the slot, and the Ravens will have one of the fastest trios anywhere.

Eric Green, arguably the best blocking tight end in football, should become a favorite target of Harbaugh on the short stuff. Backup Brian Kinchen has great hands and will allow the team to muscle up with two tight ends in short-yardage situations.

LINE—The time for talk is over. For the past two seasons, Baltimore's linemen have said they form one of the best lines in pro football. Now, as the Ravens attempt to play smash-mouth football, they'll get a chance to prove it.

The Ravens will have one of the biggest lines in the league for a second consecutive year, but this season the offense won't be as predictable. When the Ravens used a one-back set last year, opposing teams crowded their linebackers near the line of scrimmage on first and second downs so the Ravens' big guards couldn't get a running start. Outside linebackers started slicing off the shoulders of the tackles because Morris didn't have the speed to turn the corner. This year, the Ravens will keep teams guessing on first and second downs because of the new two-back formation. They'll also run more traps and sweeps.

The Ravens have one of the best tackle tandems in the league in Jonathan Ogden and Orlando Brown, and center Wally Williams is one of the best athletes

Baltimore Ravens

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
4	Harbaugh, Jim	6-3/215	12-23-63	12	Michigan	T-Ind/98	12/11*
14	Richardson, Wally	6-4/225	2-11-74	2	Penn State	D7b/97	1/0
12	Testaverde, Vinny	6-5/238	11-13-63	12	Miami (Fla.)	FA/93	13/13
10	Zeier, Eric	6-1/205	9-6-72	4	Georgia	D3a/95	5/3

Running Backs

23	Cotton, Kenyon (FB)	6-0/255	2-23-74	2	SW Louisiana	FA/97	16/0
34	Graham, Jay	5-11/220	7-14-75	2	Tennessee	D3/97	13/3
33	Holmes, Priest	5-9/205	10-7-73	2	Texas	FA/97	7/0
42	Potts, Roosevelt (FB)	6-0/250	1-8-71	5	Northeast Louisiana	FA/98	7/1*
32	Rhett, Errict	5-11/210	12-11-70	5	Florida	T-TB/98	11/0*
44	Vinson, Tony	6-1/229	3-13-71	2	Towson State	FA/97	13/0

Receivers

82	Anderson, Stevie	6-6/216	5-12-70	4	Grambling State	FA/98	0/0
86	Green, Eric (TE)	6-5/285	6-22-67	9	Liberty	FA/96	16/15
81	Jackson, Michael	6-4/195	4-12-69	8	Southern Miss	D6/91	16/15
85	Johnson, Pat	5-10/180	8-10-76	R	Oregon	D2/98	—
88	Kinchen, Brian (TE)	6-2/240	8-6-65	11	LSU	FA/91	16/6
84	Lewis, Jermaine	5-7/172	10-16-74	3	Maryland	D5/96	14/7
89	Ofofiele, A.J. (TE)	6-6/260	10-10-73	2	Missouri	FA/96	12/0
49	Quayle, Cam (TE)	6-7/255	9-24-72	R	Weber State	D7a/98	—
13	Richard, Donald	6-0/180	11-18-72	1	SW Louisiana	FA/97	0/0
83	Roe, James	6-1/187	8-23-73	3	Norfolk State	D6b/96	12/4
80	Yarborough, Ryan	6-2/195	4-26-71	4	Wyoming	W-GB/97	16/3

Offensive Linemen

74	Atkins, James (G)	6-6/306	1-28-70	5	SW Louisiana	FA/98	13/3*
76	Bernstein, Alex (G)	6-3/325	8-11-75	1	Amherst	FA/97	0/0
69	Blackshear, Jeff (G)	6-6/323	3-29-69	5	Northeast Louisiana	T-Sea/96	16/16
77	Brown, Orlando (T)	6-7/340	12-12-70	6	South Carolina State	FA/93	16/16
65	Cavil, Ben (G)	6-2/310	1-31-72	2	Oklahoma	T-Phil/97	15/8
70	Flynn, Mike	6-3/295	6-15-74	1	Maine	FA/97	0/0
71	Folau, Spencer (T)	6-5/300	4-5-73	2	Idaho	FA/96	10/0
64	Isaia, Sale	6-5/315	6-13-72	4	UCLA	FA/95	0/0
60	Mitchell, Jeff (C)	6-4/300	1-29-74	2	Florida	D5/97	0/0
75	Ogden, Jonathan	6-8/318	7-31-74	3	UCLA	D1a/96	16/16
72	Williams, Sammy (T)	6-5/318	12-14-74	R	Oklahoma	D6b/98	—
63	Williams, Wally (G)	6-2/305	2-19-71	6	Florida A&M	FA/93	10/10

Defensive Linemen

90	Burnett, Rob (E)	6-4/280	8-27-67	9	Syracuse	D5/90	15/15
92	Chase, Martin (T)	6-2/295	12-19-74	R	Oklahoma	D5a/98	—
94	Frederick, Mike (E)	6-5/280	8-6-72	4	Virginia	D3b/95	16/1
97	Jones, James (T)	6-2/290	2-6-69	8	Northern Iowa	FA/96	16/16
99	McCrary, Michael (E)	6-4/270	7-7-70	6	Wake Forest	FA/97	15/15
98	Siragusa, Tony (T)	6-3/320	5-14-67	9	Pittsburgh	FA/97	14/13
95	Ward, Chris (E)	6-3/275	2-4-74	2	Kentucky	D7a/97	5/0
93	Washington, Keith (E)	6-4/270	12-18-72	3	UNLV	FA/97	10/1
79	Webster, Larry	6-5/288	1-18-69	6	Maryland	FA/95	16/3

Linebackers

58	Boulware, Peter	6-4/255	12-18-74	2	Florida State	D1/97	16/16
51	Brown, Cornell	6-0/240	3-15-75	2	Virginia Tech	D6b/97	16/1
52	Lewis, Ray	6-1/240	5-15-75	3	Miami (Fla.)	D1b/96	16/16
54	McCloud, Tyrus	6-1/250	11-23-74	2	Louisville	D4b/97	16/0
53	Peters, Tyrell	6-0/230	8-4-74	2	Oklahoma	FA/97	4/0
50	Rogers, Ron	6-0/245	4-20-75	R	Georgia Tech	D6/98	—
55	Sharper, Jamie	6-3/240	11-23-74	2	Virginia	D2a/97	16/15

Defensive Backs

24	Brady, Donny	6-2/195	11-24-73	3	Wisconsin	FA/95	16/5
20	Herring, Kim (S)	5-11/210	10-10-75	2	Penn State	D2b/97	15/4
21	Jackson, Alfred	6-0/183	7-10-67	7	San Diego State	FA/98	0/0*
25	Jenkins, DeRon (CB)	5-11/190	11-14-73	3	Tennessee	D2/96	16/6
31	Jones, Rondell (S)	6-2/210	5-7-71	6	North Carolina	FA/97	14/12
29	Lyons, Lamar (S)	6-3/210	3-25-73	2	Washington	FA/97	1/0
27	Moore, Stevon (S)	5-11/210	2-9-67	10	Mississippi	PlanB/92	13/12
22	Starks, Duane (CB)	5-10/170	5-23-74	R	Miami	D1/98	—
41	Staten, Ralph (S)	6-3/205	12-3-74	2	Alabama	D7c/97	10/3
35	Sutter, Ryan (S)	6-1/203	9-14-74	R	Colorado	D5/98	—
37	Thompson, Bennie (S)	6-0/214	2-10-63	9	Grambling State	FA/94	16/1
36	Williams, John	5-7/180	7-26-74	1	Southern	FA/97	4/0
26	Woodson, Rod (CB)	6-0/200	3-10-65	12	Purdue	FA/98	14/14*


Specialists

9	Montgomery, Greg (P)	6-4/215	10-29-64	10	Michigan State	FA/96	16/0
3	Stover, Matt (K)	5-11/178	1-27-68	9	Louisiana Tech	PlanB/91	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Shabaka Abdul-Majid, OT; Chris Buxton, LB; Marcus Campbell, CB; Greg Coley, OT; Lionel Dalton, DT; Chatric Darby, DT; Brandon Dyson, G/T; Larry Fitzpatrick, DT; Nelson Garner, K/P; Duane Gregory, WR; Adam Hernandez, G/T; MacArthur Johnson, WR; Bryan Kish, WR; Robert Mack, CB; Rodd Newhouse, RB; Kyle Richardson, P; Rob Robertson, FB; Kareem Robinson, DE; Jeff Saturday, C; Ben Snell, RB; Bill Ward, QB.

*—Not with Ravens in 1997.



Baltimore OFFENSE

QB Harbaugh
Zeier
(C) W. Williams
Mitchell

RB Rhett Graham

FB Potts Cotton

WR Jackson Roe

LT Ogden Folau

LG Atkins Isaia

RG Blackshear Bernstein

RT O. Brown Folau

TE Green Kinchen

WR J. Lewis Johnson

CB Woodson J. Williams

RE McCrary Frederick

RT Siragusa Webster

LT J. Jones Webster

LE Burnett Washington

CB Starks Jenkins

Probable starters listed on top

WLB Sharper C. Brown

FS Herring Staten

MLB R. Lewis McCloud

SS Moore Staten

SLB Boulware C. Brown

Baltimore DEFENSE

K: Stover
P: Montgomery
KR: Johnson
PR: Johnson

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INYERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: James Atkins, G (FA/Seahawks); Jim Harbaugh, QB (trade/Colts); Roosevelt Potts, FB (FA/Colts); Errict Rhett, RB (trade/Bucs); Rod Woodson, CB (FA/49ers).

Key losses: Derrick Alexander, WR (FA/Chiefs); Earnest Byner, RB (FA); Eugene Daniel, CB (FA); Leo Goas, G (FA/Broncos); Antonio Langham, CB (FA/49ers); Bam Morris, RB (FA).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Duane Starks	CB	Miami (Fla.)
2nd	Pat Johnson	WR	Oregon
5th	Martin Chase	DT	Oklahoma
5th	Ryan Sutter	S	Colorado
6th	Ron Rogers	LB	Georgia Tech
6th	Sammy Williams	T	Oklahoma
7th	Cam Quayle	TE	Weber State

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	C. Steve Everitt	Starter with Eagles
1994	CB Antonio Langham	Starter with 49ers
	WR Derrick Alexander	Starter with Chiefs
1995	LB Craig Powell	Out of the NFL
1996	OT Jonathan Ogden	Starter with Ravens
	LB Ray Lewis	Starter with Ravens
1997	LB Peter Boulware	Starter with Ravens

Coaching Staff

Coach: Ted Marchibroda. **Offensive staff:** Lester Erb (quality control-offense) • Kirk Ferentz (assistant head coach/offense) • Al Lavan (running backs) • Richard Mann (receivers) • Don

Strock (quarterbacks) • Ken Whisenhunt (tight ends).
Defensive staff: Maxie Baughan (linebackers) • Jacob Burney (defensive line) • Marvin Lewis (defensive coordinator) • Alvin Reynolds (secondary) • Scott O'Brien (special teams) • Jim Schwartz (quality control-defense). **Others:** Darrin Simmons (strength and conditioning/quality control-special teams) • Jerry Simmons (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 6-9-1 (5th in AFC Central); 3-5 in division; 4-8 in conference; 3-4-1 at home; 3-5 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Marchibroda's regular-season record: 10-21-1 in two seasons with Ravens; 81-88-1 overall in 11 seasons with Ravens, Indianapolis and Baltimore Colts.

Marchibroda's postseason record: 2-4 overall in four appearances with Indianapolis and Baltimore Colts.

Team record past five years: 33-46-1 (.419, ranks 19th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1994 (as the Cleveland Browns).

1997 team rankings	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*330.7	5	9
Rushing offense	*99.3	T10	22
Passing offense	*231.4	4	5
Scoring offense	326	11	16
Total defense	*335.2	12	25
Rushing defense	*105.6	5	10
Passing defense	*229.6	14	28
Scoring defense	345	9	18
Takeaways	28	8	T15
Giveaways	32	T11	T20
Turnover differential	-4	13	T22
Sacks	42	T7	T15
Sacks allowed	37	8	13

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

In Peter Boulware and Jamie Sharper, the Ravens had the NFL's top rookie sack tandem last season:

Team	Players (sacks)	Total
Baltimore	Peter Boulware (11.5), Jamie Sharper (3)	14.5
Miami	Derrick Rodgers (5), Jason Taylor (5)	10
Tennessee	Kenny Holmes (7), Pratt Lyons (2.5)	9.5
Arizona	Mark Smith (6), Ty Howard (1)	7
Washington	Greg Jones (3.5), Derek Smith (2)	5.5
Dallas	Antonio Anderson (2.5), Dexter Coakley (2.5)	5
New Orleans	Keith Mitchell (4), Jared Tomich (1)	5

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	PITTSBURGH	1:01
Sept. 13	at N.Y. Jets	1:01
Sept. 20	at Jacksonville	4:15
Sept. 27	CINCINNATI	8:20
Oct. 4	Open date	
Oct. 11	TENNESSEE	1:01
Oct. 18	at Pittsburgh	1:01
Oct. 25	at Green Bay	12:01
Nov. 1	JACKSONVILLE	1:01
Nov. 8	OAKLAND	1:01
Nov. 15	at San Diego	1:05
Nov. 22	at Cincinnati	4:15
Nov. 29	INDIANAPOLIS	1:01
Dec. 6	at Tennessee	3:15
Dec. 13	MINNESOTA	4:15
Dec. 20	at Chicago	12:01
Dec. 27	DETROIT	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T11TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	JACKSONVILLE	L	27-28
Sept. 7	CINCINNATI	W	23-10
Sept. 14	at N.Y. Giants	W	24-23
Sept. 21	at Tennessee	W	36-10
Sept. 28	at San Diego	L	17-21
Oct. 5	PITTSBURGH	L	34-42
Oct. 12	Open date		
Oct. 19	MIAMI	L	13-24
Oct. 26	at Washington	W	20-17
Nov. 2	at N.Y. Jets (OT)	L	16-19
Nov. 9	at Pittsburgh	L	0-37
Nov. 16	PHILADELPHIA (OT)	T	10-10
Nov. 23	ARIZONA	L	13-16
Nov. 30	at Jacksonville	L	27-29
Dec. 7	SEATTLE	W	31-24
Dec. 14	TENNESSEE	W	21-19
Dec. 21	at Cincinnati	L	14-16

Miscellaneous

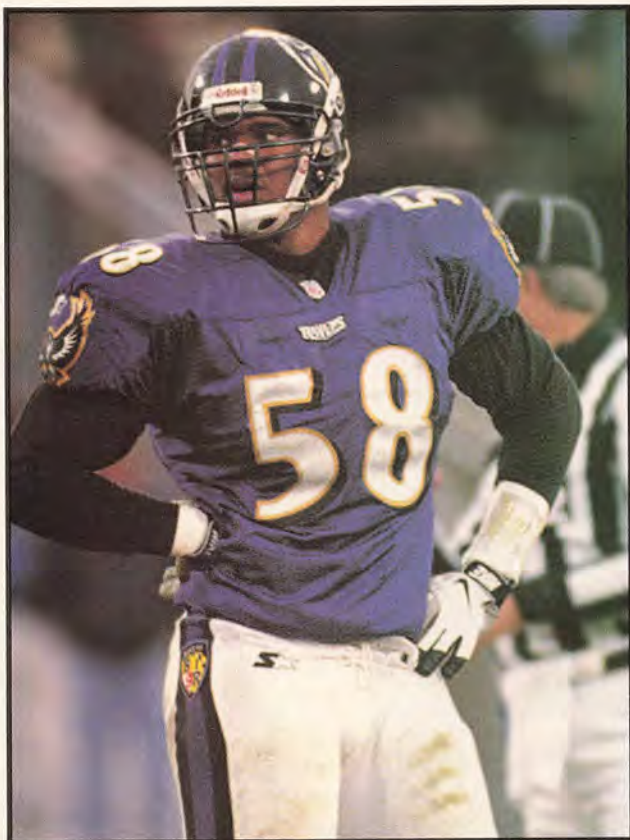
Owner: Art Modell.

Stadium (capacity, surface): name TBA (68,400, grass).

Ticket information: 410-261-RAVE.

Flagship radio stations: WJFK-AM, 1300; WLIF-FM, 101.9.

Training site: Western Maryland College, Westminster, Md. 401-654-6200.



JED KIRSCHBAUM FOR TSN

Boulware lived up to his rookie hype, finishing with 11½ sacks. He is part of a young—but potentially great—group of linebackers.

on the team. Right guard Jeff Blakeshear is overpowering, but there still is a hole at left guard. Steve Atkins is penciled in for now.

Because of their size, some question whether the Ravens' guards have enough speed to be solid lead blockers, particularly Blakeshear. If this group flourishes as run blockers, the whole offense will succeed.

DEFENSE

LINE—Barring injury, this could become one of the most dominant groups in football. The Ravens play a gap-control defense, and they have three solid tackles in Siragusa, James Jones and Larry Webster. They were the main reason middle linebacker Ray Lewis made the Pro Bowl last season. Webster should have a better season this year, but skeptics predict Jones will not duplicate his stellar 1997 season. Look for fifth-round pick Martin Chase to possibly work his way into the rotation, possibly as a third-down pass rusher.

End Michael McCrary had nine sacks last season despite playing most of the year with a knee injury. He seems fully rehabilitated and could earn All-Pro recognition this season. If the defense is going to be successful, the line has to be the anchor. They'll have to keep opposing linemen off the linebackers and provide enough pressure to cover up a suspect secondary.

Another concern is injuries. McCrary, Siragusa and end Rob Burnett have had major knee surgeries during their careers.

LINEBACKERS—This is pro football's version of the young and the restless. As if he wasn't fast enough, Lewis spent part of his offseason in California working with a specialist to improve his speed. Lewis' game is run and hit, and with a solid group of linemen up front, there is no reason for him not to lead the league in tackles again.

As a rookie last year, strongside linebacker Peter Boulware established himself as one of the league's best pass rushers; he had 11½ sacks despite missing all of camp. With a year under his belt and some offseason bulk, he'll be a terror again. There is no reason to believe Boulware and McCrary can't average a sack a game each.

Weakside linebacker Jamie Sharper started out slow last season but became consistent after spending some time on the bench early in the

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	C+	Defensive line:	C+
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	B	Secondary:	C-
Receivers:	C	Special teams:	C

year. He put more time into studying film and became better at recognition. He still has some room for improvement, but as a group this unit has few weaknesses.

The Ravens also have good depth with Tyrus McCloud and rookie Ron Rogers on the inside.

SECONDARY—The team's Achilles' heel for the past two seasons will be a major pain again. The Ravens are gambling that University of Miami cornerback Duane Starks, their first-round pick, can make the transition to left cornerback, where he'll usually be pitted against the other team's fastest receiver. Starks has great cover ability, but he'll get tested early in the AFC Central by the likes of Yancey Thigpen, Keenan McCardell and Carl Pickens.

The addition of Rod Woodson will help, but Woodson has had health problems of late. It will be interesting to see if Woodson can make it through another season without missing substantial playing time.

When healthy, strong safety Stevon Moore is one of the hardest hitters in the game, but he had major offseason surgery on both knees. An already slow player has become a step slower.

Kim Herring will start at free safety, but he needs to become a better tackler than he was as a rookie last season. Ralph Staten will back up Herring and Moore. The Ravens' secondary has big-play potential; unfortunately, it's usually for the other team.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Ravens should see big improvement in this area because the bulk of the 17 rookies or first-year players used on special teams a year ago are back. They also have a coach, Scott O'Brien, who is a thorough technician.

Instead of having just one threat to returns kicks and punts, the Ravens will have as many as three in Lewis, Starks and Johnson. A year ago, Lewis did double duty as a return specialist and slot receiver. Look for Lewis and Johnson to get the bulk of the work; Starks won't see much action on returns unless there's an injury.

Matt Stover, the seventh-most accurate kicker in NFL history, again should handle the kicking duties. Though he's entering his eighth NFL season, Stover has yet to prove he can kick game-winners consistently.

Speaking of consistency, Marchibroda wasn't happy with punter Greg Montgomery last season, but it's doubtful the Ravens will replace him because of salary-cap concerns. The Ravens will bring in a free agent to pressure him in camp, but it's Montgomery's job to lose.

SCHEDULE

The Ravens will find out if they're pretenders or contenders right away. Five of their first eight games are against teams that went to the playoffs, and six of those are against AFC Central teams. After opening against the Steelers and the Jets, the Ravens play AFC Central foes in four of the next five weeks.

The Ravens' fifth-place schedule ranks tied for 11th-toughest in the league, as foes posted a cumulative 129-127 record last season. The toughest point comes in mid-October, when the Ravens play Pittsburgh and Green Bay on the road and Jacksonville at home in successive weeks. But after that stretch, they get some relief in the form of Oakland, San Diego, Cincinnati and Indianapolis.

BOTTOM LINE

The Ravens have improved dramatically and will get an emotional lift playing in a new stadium. Physically, they can compete with anyone, but question marks in the secondary and at wide receiver may cost them a playoff berth by a game or so.

TSN

Mike Preston covers the Ravens for the Baltimore Sun.



Defensive newcomers, added speed mean hopes are high in Cincinnati

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 4th

By **CHICK LUDWIG**

You'd think a team that hasn't been to the playoffs since 1990 would have to look up to see rock bottom.

But that's not the case with the Bengals, who aren't dwelling on their past as much as they are looking toward what could be a fantastic future.

President/G.M. Mike Brown and coach Bruce Coslet feel good about their team's postseason chances now that they've beefed up the defense and weeded out some problem players who were more concerned about paychecks than performance.

A group of free-agent acquisitions—ends Michael Bankston and Clyde Simmons, linebacker Jerry Olsavsky and cornerback Thomas Randolph—have emerged as instant leaders, and first-round linebackers Takeo Spikes and Brian Simmons bring speed to the NFL's 28th-ranked defense.

Without now-retired Boomer Esiason, re-energized quarterback Jeff Blake feels confident he can return to his Pro Bowl form of 1995, when he led the AFC with 28 touchdown passes.

With a nice mix of youthful enthusiasm and veteran leadership, it's as if somebody opened the windows on a sunny, breezy spring day to let the fresh air in. Everyone is optimistic.

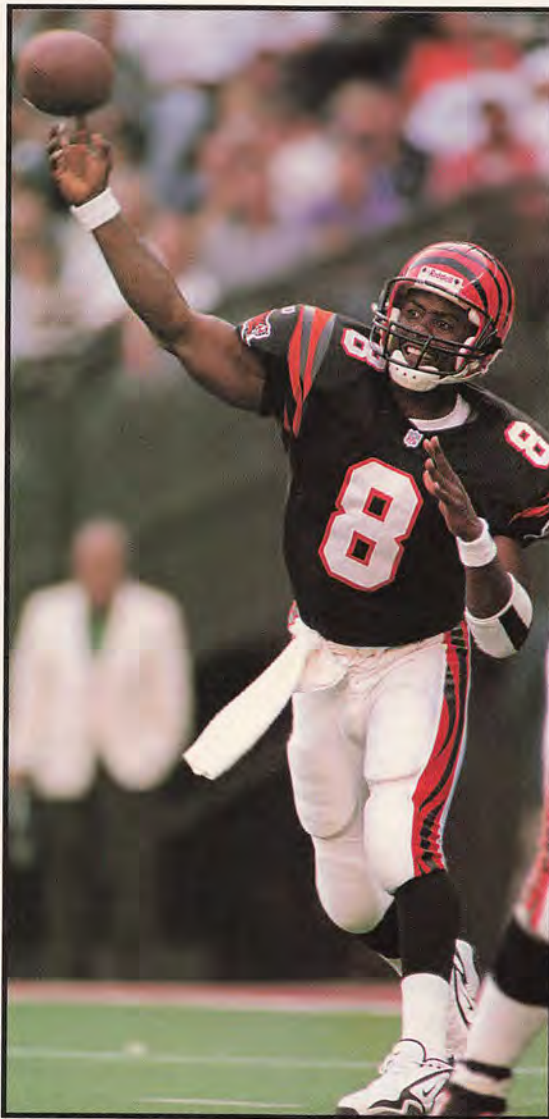
"I don't mean to cast aspersions on the people who left," Brown said. "It's just that right now the guys who are here seem dedicated to the task of having a winning football team and not concerned about their own problems or things that are counterproductive."

COACHING

The Bengals, who were desperately looking for a leader to replace Esiason, may have found one in their coach. Coslet grabbed the team by the lapels early and shook it until it understood his mission in '98: If you don't bring a good attitude and solid work ethic to the table, then you don't get to eat. Coslet proved his point when he sent veterans James Francis and David Dunn home from minicamp for being overweight and out of shape—a move long overdue.

He won the admiration of his players who are just as tired as he is of the franchise's 36-76 record since 1991, including a combined 9-47 mark over the first half of the past seven seasons.

For all his offensive brilliance and play-calling creativity, Coslet's flaw is that he brings his rookies along too slowly. Case in point: Corey Dillon. He gained 1,129 yards in '97, but barely played (39 carries, 196 yards) the first eight games. That must change this year. The best athletes, regardless of age, have to play.



After being benched last season, Blake is the starter again by default. His decision-making has been a problem at times.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—After an ugly 1997 season in which he slumped and got benched after 11 games, Blake has emerged as the starter by default following Esiason's retirement to the broadcasting booth.

Blake worked hard in the offseason, re-dedicating himself to fundamentals in an attempt to return to his form of 1995-96, when he threw 52 touchdown passes. He also wants to re-establish himself as a leader, which could be difficult if the team doesn't win early.

The strong-armed Blake throws one of the prettiest deep balls in the NFL. He also has tremendous athleticism. But he gets into trouble when he tries to do too much. He'll force things, and that's when fumbles and interceptions occur.

Almost every move of the offseason has been designed to take pressure off Blake. He should excel with a fine stable of receivers, solid running game and cohesive line. Look for a moving pocket with lots of roll-out patterns so his 6-foot frame won't be a liability.

Because of Blake's record of 21-31 as a starter, management considers him in a tier below the game's superstars. The staff stuck with him for 11 games in '97, but it might not be as generous if the team stumbles out of the gate. The burden of responsibility then would fall on journeyman Paul Justin, who was acquired in an offseason trade with the Colts. Justin is a quiet leader and solid passer, but he's uncomfortable when flushed out of the pocket.

Second-year man Eric Kresser should keep the third-string job. He's a fine passer who only needs more experience.

RUNNING BACKS—A lot of teams would love to have Dillon or Ki-Jana Carter. The Bengals have both.

And if you're looking for dirty laundry, you're in the wrong place. There's no bitterness on Carter's part for losing the starting tailback job. He understands Dillon had a great rookie year and deserves to start. He also realizes there's enough room and balance in the highly sophisticated offense for both to play a lot.

Dillon is a physical specimen who has the perfect blend of speed and power to punish tacklers and run away from them. Carter and Eric Bieniemy will provide fresh legs, but Dillon will wear defenses down. And even though fullback Brian Milne is content in his role as a blocking back, he has shown he is a capable runner with a nose for the goal line.

With so much talent to go with an improved line, terrific receivers

and a better defense, look for the Bengals to take charge in the time-of-possession category and score more points than their 22.2 average in 1997.

RECEIVERS—You want speed, toughness and a clutch third-down receiver? The Bengals have guys who fit all three categories. Darnay Scott, Carl Pickens and David Dunn complement one another well.

Scott stretches the defense. But his great speed is sometimes offset by a lack of concentration that leads to dropped passes. The key is to get him involved and keep him there; that happened in late '97, when he blossomed the final five games as the feature receiver after Pickens went down with a torn groin muscle.

Pickens is the thoroughbred, a reliable go-to guy who is eager to return to his Pro Bowl form of 1995 and 1996 after his season-ending injury early in Game 12 last year. He has a unique ability to coast somewhat in practice, then turn up the volume on game days. Although he can go deep, Pickens' strength is fighting off bump-and-run cornerbacks at the line of scrimmage, catching medium-range passes with his tremendous leaping ability and outrunning defenders.

Dunn, who combines a tight end's body (6-3, 220) with wide receiver speed, earns his living making difficult catches in heavy traffic on third down.

Having two good receiving tight ends in Tony McGee and Marco Battaglia is a huge plus because they give the passing game flexibility. Both are vastly improved blockers, too.

LINE—Paul Alexander is smiling because—for the first time in four years as line coach—he isn't playing musical chairs at the start of a season with injuries and question marks.

The line jelled late in '97 and should continue where it left off because all five starters return.

Center Darrick Brilz, guards Rich Braham and Ken Blackman and tackles Kevin Sargent and Willie Anderson have the strength to open holes for Dillon and Carter and the finesse to protect Blake. What's more, the backups appear to be in place should a starter go down. Rod Payne, inactive for all 16 games as a rookie in '97, emerges from his "redshirt" season to sub for Brilz. He'll be flanked by guards Mike Goff and Scott Brumfield and tackles Rod Jones and Anthony Brown.

Goff, a third-round pick from Iowa, is a mauler. But the calculated gamble of not drafting somebody to groom behind the oft-injured Sargent could backfire. Jones struggled the first eight games of '97 while subbing for Sargent, who spent the first six weeks on the physically unable to perform list after missing all of '96 with a herniated disk in his neck. The additional year of experience should help Jones react to all the stunts and blitzes he'll face this season. But if Sargent gets hurt and Jones fails, the offense could be in trouble.

DEFENSE

LINE—With the departure of Dan "Big Daddy" Wilkinson and the injury to John Copeland (torn Achilles' tendon), this became the biggest problem area in the 3-4 defense. But the sting doesn't hurt quite as much with the acquisition of free-agent ends Bankston and Clyde Simmons.

With Bankston's run-stopping ability at left end and Simmons' pass-rushing skills at right end, the two are

Cincinnati Bengals

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
8	Blake, Jeff	6-0/205	12-4-70	7	East Carolina	W-NY/94	11/11
10	Justin, Paul	6-4/211	5-19-68	4	Arizona State	T-Ind/98	8/4*
15	Kresser, Eric	6-2/223	2-8-73	1	Marshall	FA/97	0/0
12	May, Chad	6-1/219	9-28-71	3	Kansas State	FA/98	0/0*

Running Backs

36	Bennett, Brandon	5-11/223	2-3-73	1	South Carolina	FA/98	0/0*
21	Bieniemy, Eric	5-7/205	8-15-69	8	Colorado	FA/95	16/0
32	Carter, Ki-Jana	5-10/222	9-12-73	4	Penn State	D1/95	15/10
28	Dillon, Corey	6-1/220	10-24-75	2	Washington	D2/97	16/6
45	Douthard, Ty (FB)	6-1/214	5-27-73	1	Illinois	FA/97	1/0
44	Milne, Brian (FB)	6-3/254	1-7-73	3	Penn State	W-Ind/96	16/16
41	Parker, Marcus (FB)	5-9/244	11-12-76	R	Virginia Tech	D7a/98	—

Receivers

89	Battaglia, Marco (TE)	6-3/250	1-25-73	3	Rutgers	D2/96	16/0
88	Bush, Steve (TE)	6-3/258	7-4-74	2	Arizona State	FA/97	16/0
87	Doering, Chris	6-4/195	5-19-73	1	Florida	W-Ind/98	2/0*
80	Dunn, David	6-3/220	6-10-72	4	Fresno State	D5/95	14/5
85	Hundon, James	6-1/173	4-9-71	2	Portland State	FA/96	16/0
84	Jenkins, Mike	6-3/191	8-25-74	1	Hampton	FA/97	3/0
82	McGee, Tony (TE)	6-3/246	4-21-71	6	Michigan	D2/93	16/16
81	Pickens, Carl	6-2/206	3-23-70	7	Tennessee	D2/92	12/12
86	Scott, Darnay	6-1/180	7-7-72	5	San Diego State	D2/94	16/15
83	Tucker, Jason	6-1/182	6-24-76	R	TCU	D6/98	—
49	Vaughn, Damian (TE)	6-4/247	6-14-75	R	Miami (Ohio)	D7b/98	—

Offensive Linemen

71	Anderson, Willie (T)	6-5/335	7-11-75	3	Auburn	D1/96	16/16
66	Blackman, Ken (G)	6-6/315	11-8-72	3	Illinois	D3/96	13/13
74	Braham, Rich (C)	6-4/302	11-6-70	5	West Virginia	W-Ari/94	16/16
65	Brilz, Darrick (C)	6-3/295	2-14-64	12	Oregon State	FA/94	16/16
75	Brown, Anthony (T)	6-5/315	11-6-72	4	Utah	FA/95	6/0
72	Brumfield, Scott (G)	6-8/325	8-19-70	5	Brigham Young	FA/94	15/3
88	Davis, Joel (G)	6-5/310	4-6-73	1	Army	FA/96	0/0
63	Goff, Mike (G)	6-5/311	1-6-76	R	Iowa	D3b/98	—
62	Gutierrez, Brock (C)	6-3/304	8-25-73	3	Central Michigan	FA/98	0/0*
60	Jones, Rod (T)	6-4/320	1-11-74	3	Kansas	D7/96	13/8
64	Payne, Rod (C)	6-4/295	6-14-74	2	Michigan	D3/97	0/0
77	Sargent, Kevin (T)	6-6/295	3-31-69	7	Eastern Washington	FA/92	10/8
59	Truitt, Greg (C)	6-0/235	12-8-65	5	Penn State	FA/94	16/0

Defensive Linemen

90	Bankston, Michael (E)	6-3/280	3-12-70	7	Sam Houston State	FA/98	16/16*
92	Copeland, John (E)	6-3/280	9-20-70	6	Alabama	D1/93	15/15
94	Langford, Jevon (E)	6-3/276	2-16-74	3	Oklahoma State	D4/96	15/0
97	Purvis, Andre (NT)	6-4/304	7-14-73	2	North Carolina	D5/97	7/1
99	Seals, Ray (E)	6-3/306	6-17-65	11	None	FA/98	14/7*
96	Simmons, Clyde (E)	6-6/281	8-4-64	13	Western Carolina	FA/98	16/13*
79	Stallings, Ramondo (E)	6-7/290	11-21-71	5	San Diego State	D7/94	6/0
96	Steele, Glen (E)	6-4/295	10-4-74	R	Michigan	D4/98	—
93	Thompson, Mike (NT)	6-4/290	12-22-72	2	Wisconsin	FA/97	0/0
67	von Oelhoffen, Kimo (NT)	6-4/305	1-30-71	5	Boise State	D6/94	13/12

Linebackers

98	Curtis, Canute	6-2/256	8-4-74	2	West Virginia	FA/97	3/0
95	Foley, Steve	6-4/270	9-9-75	R	Northeast Louisiana	D3a/98	—
50	Francis, James	6-5/257	8-4-68	9	Baylor	D1/90	16/16
91	Garrville, Billy	6-3/252	3-11-74	2	Duke	FA/97	12/4
57	Olsavsky, Jerry	6-1/224	3-29-67	10	Pittsburgh	FA/98	16/0*
56	Simmons, Brian	6-3/233	6-21-75	R	North Carolina	D1b/98	—
51	Spikes, Takeo	6-2/221	12-17-76	R	Auburn	D1a/98	—
52	Terry, Tim	6-3/248	7-26-74	2	Temple	FA/97	5/0
58	Tovar, Steve	6-3/244	4-25-70	6	Ohio State	D3/93	14/5
53	Tumulty, Tom	6-3/247	2-11-73	3	Pittsburgh	D6/96	11/11
55	Wilson, Reinard	6-2/251	12-12-73	2	Florida State	D1/97	16/4

Defensive Backs

33	Ambrose, Ashley (CB)	5-10/185	9-17-70	7	Mississippi Valley State	FA/96	16/16
30	Gilliard, Cory (S)	6-0/210	10-10-74	1	Ball State	FA/97	0/0
27	Hawkins, Artrell (CB)	5-10/190	11-24-75	R	Cincinnati	D2/98	—
34	Mack, Tremain (S)	6-0/193	11-21-74	2	Miami (Fla.)	D4/97	4/4
31	Myers, Greg (S)	6-1/202	9-30-72	3	Colorado State	D5/96	16/14
20	Randolph, Thomas (CB)	5-9/185	10-5-70	5	Kansas State	FA/98	16/4*
23	Sawyer, Corey (CB)	5-11/177	10-4-71	5	Florida State	D4/94	15/2
35	Shade, Sam (S)	6-1/201	6-14-73	4	Alabama	D4/95	16/12
22	Spencer, Jimmy (CB)	5-10/185	3-29-69	7	Florida	FA/96	16/9
42	Wright, Lawrence (S)	6-1/211	9-6-73	2	Florida	FA/97	4/0

Specialists

6	Costello, Brad (P)	6-0/230	12-12-74	R	Boston University	FA/98	—
11	Johnson, Lee (P)	6-2/200	11-27-61	14	Brigham Young	W-Cle/88	16/0
9	Pelfrey, Doug (K)	5-11/185	9-25-70	6	Kentucky	D8/93	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Alonzo Clayton, WR; Mike Doughty, OT; Damon Gibson, WR; Darryle Heidelberg, WR; Jay Kirchoff, K; Bill Kushner, P; Jeff Leonard, DT; Derrick Lavake, DT; Adrian Luster, DT; Ric Mathias, CB; Jason Moore, S; Kelvin Moore, S; Buddy Rodgers, RB; Adrian Ross, LB; Erik Storz, LB.
*—Not with Bengals in 1997.



Cincinnati OFFENSE

Dillon
Carter



Milne
Parker

K: Pelfrey
P: Costello
KR: Bienenmy, Hundon
PR: Hawkins, Myers

(QB) Blake
Justin
(C) Britz
Payne

Sargent
Jones

Braham
Goff

Blackman
Brumfield

Anderson
Brown

McGee
Battaglia

Pickens
Dunn

Scott
Hundon



Ambrose
Spencer



C. Simmons
Langford

Spikes
Olsavsky

von Oelhoffen
Thompson

Tumulty
B. Simmons

Bankston
Stallings

Randolph
Hawkins

Wilson
Granville



Francis
Foley

Probable starters
listed on top

Myers
Gilliard



Shade
Mack

Cincinnati DEFENSE

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Michael Bankston, DE (FA/Cardinals); Chris Doering, WR (waived/Colts); Paul Justin, QB (trade/Colts); Jerry Olsavsky, LB (FA/Steelers); Thomas Randolph, CB (FA/Giants); Ray Seals, DE (FA/Panthers); Clyde Simmons, DE (FA/Jaguars).

Key losses: Brentson Buckner, DT (released/49ers); Andre Collins, LB (released/Bears); Gerald Dixon, LB (FA/Chargers); Boomer Esiason, QB (retired); Scottie Graham, FB (released); Ricardo McDonald, LB (released); Bo Orlando, S (released); Tito Paul, CB (waived/Broncos); Dan Wilkinson, DL (trade/Redskins).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Takeo Spikes	LB	Auburn
1st	Brian Simmons	LB	North Carolina
2nd	Artrell Hawkins	CB	Cincinnati
3rd	Steve Foley	LB	Northeast Louisiana
3rd	Mike Goff	G	Iowa
4th	Glen Steele	DE	Michigan
6th	Jason Tucker	WR	TCU
7th	Marcus Parker	RB	Virginia Tech
7th	Damian Vaughn	TE	Miami (Ohio)

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	DE John Copeland	On I.R. with Bengals
1994	DE Dan Wilkinson	Starter with Redskins
1995	RB Ki-Jana Carter	Backup with Bengals
1996	OT Willie Anderson	Starter with Bengals
1997	LB Reinard Wilson	Starter with Bengals

Coaching Staff

Coach: Bruce Coslet. **Offensive staff:** Paul Alexander (offensive line) • Jim Anderson (running backs) • Ken Anderson (offensive coordinator) • John Garrett (offensive staff assis-

tant) • Bob Wyle (tight ends). **Defensive staff:** Louie Cioffi (defensive staff assistant) • Mark Duffner (linebackers) • Ray Horton (secondary) • Tim Krumrie (defensive line) • Dick LeBeau (defensive coordinator/assistant head coach). **Others:** Al Roberts (special teams) • Kim Wood (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 7-9 (4th in AFC Central); 3-5 in division; 5-7 in conference; 6-2 at home; 1-7 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Coslet's regular-season record: 14-11 in two seasons with Bengals; 40-49 overall in six seasons with Bengals and Jets.

Coslet's postseason record: 0-1 in one appearance with Jets.

Team record past five years: 28-52 (.350, ranks 25th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1990

1997 team rankings	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*330.1	6	10
Rushing offense	*122.9	5	9
Passing offense	*207.3	8	13
Scoring offense	355	7	10
Total defense	*355.1	14	28
Rushing defense	*138.9	14	29
Passing defense	*216.2	T8	T21
Scoring defense	405	13	27
Takeaways	23	13	25
Giveaways	22	T5	T7
Turnover differential	1	T8	T14
Sacks	35	T10	T24
Sacks allowed	46	T10	T21

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Corey Dillon may have been a rookie last year, but he was automatic picking up the first down on 3rd-and-1:

Player, Team	Att.	FD	Pct.
Corey Dillon, Cincinnati	10	10	100.0
Marcus Allen, Kansas City	13	12	92.3
Kordell Stewart, Pittsburgh	12	11	91.7
Jerome Bettis, Pittsburgh	10	9	90.0
James Stewart, Jacksonville	11	9	81.8
Bam Morris, Baltimore	10	8	80.0
Ricky Watters, Philadelphia	16	11	68.8
Eddie George, Tennessee	12	8	66.7
Karim Abdul-Jabbar, Miami	14	9	64.3
Marshall Faulk, Indianapolis	16	8	50.0

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	TENNESSEE	1:01
Sept. 13	at Detroit	1:01
Sept. 20	GREEN BAY	1:01
Sept. 27	at Baltimore	8:20
Oct. 4	Open date	
Oct. 11	PITTSBURGH	1:01
Oct. 18	at Tennessee	12:01
Oct. 25	at Oakland	1:15
Nov. 1	DENVER	1:01
Nov. 8	at Jacksonville	1:01
Nov. 15	at Minnesota	12:01
Nov. 22	BALTIMORE	4:15
Nov. 29	JACKSONVILLE	1:01
Dec. 6	BUFFALO	1:01
Dec. 13	at Indianapolis	1:01
Dec. 20	at Pittsburgh	1:01
Dec. 27	TAMPA BAY	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T3RD

1997 Results

Aug. 31	ARIZONA	W	24-21
Sept. 7	at Baltimore	L	10-23
Sept. 14	Open date		
Sept. 21	at Denver	L	20-38
Sept. 28	N.Y. JETS	L	14-31
Oct. 5	at Jacksonville	L	13-21
Oct. 12	at Tennessee	L	7-30
Oct. 19	PITTSBURGH	L	10-26
Oct. 26	at N.Y. Giants	L	27-29
Nov. 2	SAN DIEGO	W	38-31
Nov. 9	at Indianapolis	W	28-13
Nov. 16	at Pittsburgh	L	3-20
Nov. 23	JACKSONVILLE	W	31-26
Nov. 30	at Philadelphia	L	42-44
Dec. 4	TENNESSEE	W	41-14
Dec. 14	DALLAS	W	31-24
Dec. 21	BALTIMORE	W	16-14

Miscellaneous

President: Mike Brown.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Cinergy Field (60,389, artificial).

Ticket information: 513-621-3550.

Flagship radio stations: WBOB-AM, 1160; WUBE-FM, 105.1.

Training site: Georgetown College, Georgetown, Ky.; 502-863-7088.



ED KESSEN / TSN

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B
Offensive backfield:	A
Offensive line:	B+
Receivers:	A-
Defensive line:	C
Linebackers:	B
Secondary:	C
Special teams:	C+

When he wants to be, Pickens is one of the best receivers in the NFL. He's looking to bounce back after a mediocre '97 season.

a good complement on a defense crying for leadership. Throw in capable nose tackle Kimo von Oelhoffen and the Bengals don't appear quite as vulnerable on the line.

Simmons' May 13 signing was a necessity because of Copeland's injury and Ray Seals' weight problem. Seals entered Duke University's program in an effort to lose 30 pounds off his 6-3, 350-pound frame. If Seals can't regain his stamina, Simmons will own the right end spot while the grooming of third-year man Jevon Langford and rookie Glen Steele continues. Langford suffered from a season-long sprained ankle last season; Steele shows promise but needs time to develop.

On third downs, Simmons could play inside while right outside linebacker Reinard Wilson moves to end, his college position at Florida State. Wilson is up to 262 after adding 12 pounds of muscle in the off-season.

LINEBACKERS—Thanks to the draft and free agency, linebacker is stronger because of an influx of speed. There's a nice mix of youngsters to go with veterans Steve Tovar, Tom Tumulty, Olsavsky and Francis, but youth shouldn't be interpreted as a lack of ability.

Spikes and Brian Simmons are highly skilled rookies with enough versatility to stop the run, cover running backs and rush the quarterback. Both are sorely needed to fill gaps in a defense gashed repeatedly in '97.

Last year's philosophy among players—when in doubt, blitz—will change. Another year in coordinator Dick LeBeau's system gives everyone more confidence.

Olsavsky, who played under LeBeau at Pittsburgh, fits the scheme well. His ability to call defensive signals provides a perfect learning environment for Spikes, Simmons and second-year men Wilson, Billy Granville, Tim Terry and Canute Curtis.

Getting sent home from minicamp was a rude awakening for Francis. If he doesn't shape up, he's gone.

SECONDARY—Without a strong pass rush last season, the secondary was helpless. It had to cover receivers longer and got picked apart, especially at right cornerback.

Proving one team's garbage is another team's gold, the Bengals signed Randolph, who lost his starting job with the Giants. He still has fine speed and coverage skills and will be given every chance to win the position opposite left cornerback Ashley Ambrose, who made the Pro Bowl in '96.

How soon rookie Artrell Hawkins becomes a starter depends on how quickly he develops. And don't count out Jimmy Spencer and Corey Sawyer. Sawyer lacks blazing speed but is a playmaker, while Spencer did more offseason conditioning than before in an attempt to regain the starting job he lost in '97, when he got burned too often.

Strong safety Sam Shade, the team's leading tackler in '96, sat out

minicamp in a contract dispute. But he's an exclusive rights free agent; if he doesn't play for the Bengals, he won't play at all. Tremain Mack will back him up. Greg Myers continues to blossom at free safety; he is big and fast and plays a rugged center field.

SPECIAL TEAMS

While Doug Pelfrey is a lock as the kicker, the odds of 14-year punter Lee Johnson remaining in Cincinnati continue to dwindle with the emergence of non-drafted rookie Brad Costello of Boston University. Costello is especially good at angling punts toward the sideline, which special teams coach Al Roberts loves. Johnson may have cut himself when he said the Bengals should release him early so he can catch on elsewhere. Still, don't look for the Bengals to pull the trigger too soon. They want to see how Johnson and Costello perform in exhibition games.

Bieniemy set a team record with a 102-yard kickoff return against the Giants and will remain in that role; he'll get help from wide receivers Dunn and James Hundon. Myers is a solid but unspectacular punt returner who could be replaced by Hawkins, who has a quicker first step.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

With nine games against '97 playoff teams, the Bengals were cut no slack by the scheduling gods. The front office loves the home schedule because last season's Super Bowl participants—Denver and Green Bay—visit Cinergy Field. But four games against the rugged NFC Central won't be easy.

If the Bengals don't win five of their first seven games, they could be in trouble because six of their last nine are against playoff teams. They face a brutal six-game stretch after a Week 5 bye—home games with Pittsburgh and Denver and road games against Tennessee, Oakland, Jacksonville and Minnesota.

The good news: The Bengals won their only dome game of '97, and they have three this year (Detroit, Minnesota and Indianapolis). And if they're in the playoff chase heading into the final week, they could get a late Christmas present: The warm-weather Buccaneers must travel to cold Cincinnati.

BOTTOM LINE

The Bengals have a chance at their first winning season since 1990 because an improved defense—in its second season under LeBeau—will complement an explosive offense. But it takes time to master the 3-4 zone blitz. The team still is a year or two away from making the playoffs.

TSN

Chick Ludwig covers the Bengals for the Dayton (Ohio) Daily News.



Coughlin, Jaguars hope injury bug has been banished from the area

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 2nd

BY PETE PRISCO

Tom Coughlin had an out, a season-long out. The Jaguars' feisty coach, who was coming off a 1996 season in which he took a second-year team to the AFC championship game, saw his '97 team decimated by injuries. Other coaches might have used the injuries as an excuse, but Coughlin used them as motivation.

Just don't ask him to do it again.

"It was a tough, trying season in terms of injuries," Coughlin said. "But you go on. What else can you do?"

The Jaguars were 11-5, but the injuries put a damper on a season that opened with Super Bowl aspirations. Coughlin entered the season thinking his team would be one full of competition, with good players battling good players throughout the season. He never imagined most of that competition would be for the best positions in the training room.

The team lost its top three defensive tackles for the season, and its best offensive lineman (tackle Tony Boselli), best defensive lineman (end Tony Brackens), best linebacker (Kevin Hardy) and best cover guy (cornerback Aaron Beasley) missed time with injuries.

The biggest blow may have been quarterback Mark Brunell's partially torn ACL in the preseason. Brunell missed just two games, but he clearly was not the same player he had been in '96, when he was the only quarterback in the league to take every snap for his team and led NFL quarterbacks in passing yards and rushing yards.

All those players are expected to be 100 percent by the opening of training camp. That, in itself, will make this a better team.

Offensively, the Jaguars finished third in scoring (behind Super Bowl teams Denver and Green Bay), but they need to upgrade a running game that ranked 18th. That's why they used two draft picks in the first four rounds on backs, including the ninth overall on Florida's Fred Taylor, a big guy with good speed.

Defensively, the team will be motivated by what happened in the 42-17 loss to the Broncos in an AFC wild-card playoff game. Denver rushed for 310 yards as the injury-decimated defense offered little resistance.

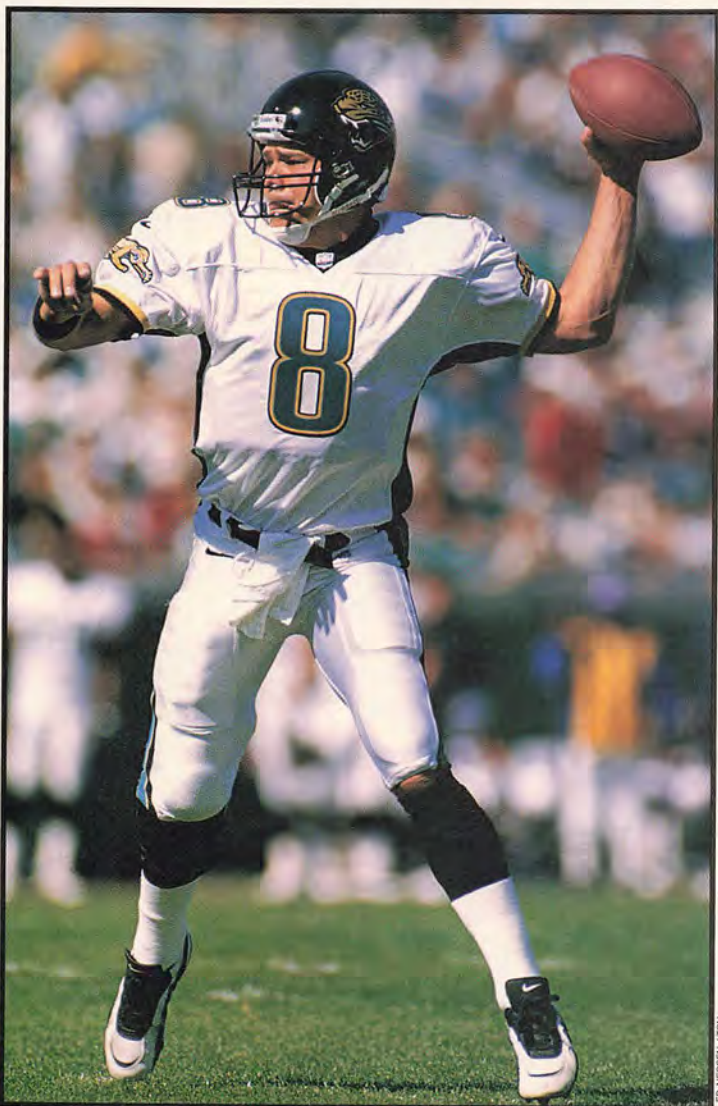
The signing of free-agent linebacker Bryce Paup, the drafting of safety Donovan Darius in the first round (25th overall) and the improved health of many defensive players should lift this defense up in the rankings.

COACHING

Coughlin, who received a one-year extension in the summer of 1997 and has two years left on his contract, now has a much better understanding with his players. He still has a laundry list of nit-picky rules, but players are much more accommodating of him than they were in the first two seasons of "Tyrannical Tom."

The offense is run by coordinator Chris Palmer, an outstanding teacher of quarterbacks, with Coughlin having major input. Palmer, who came to the Jags before the '97 season from the Patriots, and Coughlin feel the team needs to upgrade the running game, so look for a move in that direction.

Defensive coordinator Dick Jauron, who was a finalist for the Colts' coaching position, was handcuffed by a lack of talent and injuries in the team's first three seasons. With better talent this time around, expect a more aggressive approach from Jauron.



A knee injury had a residual effect on Brunell, who wasn't as daring in the pocket as in the past. He's expected to play at 100 percent this season.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Although Brunell passed for 306 yards in his first game back from his knee injury, he clearly was limited in mobility. Brunell needs that mobility to be successful. He did cut down on his interceptions last season (from 20 to seven), but he was not as daring with his throws, often making the safer pass. For this offense to return to its '96 playoff form, Brunell needs to return to his free-wheeling ways.

Brunell says his mobility was limited by the hefty knee brace he was forced to wear. He will not wear it this season.

Rob Johnson was traded to Buffalo in the offseason, leaving Steve Matthews as the backup. Matthews started Game 2 last season—when Brunell and Johnson were out with injuries—and completed 23-of-35 passes for 252 yards in a 40-13 win over the Giants. He does not have

a big arm but is a smart quarterback who sees the field. Rookie Jonathan Quinn, a big guy from a small-college background (Middle Tennessee State), will be the third quarterback.

RUNNING BACKS—Natrone Means, the team's starter for most of the past two seasons, returned to San Diego as a free agent. The team felt it needed an upgrade at that position, which is why it drafted Taylor and used a fourth-round pick on Iowa's Tavian Banks. Taylor will push James Stewart for the starting job, and Banks is expected to give the team its first legitimate third-down back.

Stewart has shown flashes of being a solid NFL back, but some in the organization question whether he can be a 20-carry back. He needs to improve his toughness inside the tackles if he is to beat out Taylor, who is more of a big-play threat.

Starting fullback Ty Hallock left in free agency, but that position isn't much of a factor in the offense. The team hopes second-year player Daimon Shelton can emerge as a bruising blocking back, but this is a position of concern.

RECEIVERS—Jimmy Smith and Keenan McCardell continued to be one of the best tandems in the league last season.

Smith caught 82 passes for 1,324 yards and four touchdowns, and went to his first Pro Bowl. He got off to a quick start, but struggled when teams began doubling him on the outside. To get to the next level, he needs to learn how to deal with double teams.

With Smith doubled, McCardell had a huge second half. In his final six games, he caught 45 passes, finishing with a team-leading 85 for 1,164 yards and five touchdowns. A precise route runner, McCardell does most of his damage over the middle.

The battle for the No. 3 position will be between incumbent Willie Jackson, whose numbers in '97 (17 catches for 206 yards) were down from the year before, and the speedier Reggie Barlow, who appears ready to emerge as a receiver after establishing himself as a return man in '97.

The team feels it has a budding star at tight end in Damon Jones. A fifth-round pick in '97, Jones took a while to learn the offense but by season's end was the starter and showed big-play ability. He is also a superb blocker, which will help the running game. Pete Mitchell is a steady passing target and will be Jones' backup.

LINE—The team has one of the biggest lines in the league, yet struggles to run-block.

Boselli, perhaps the best left tackle in the league, missed time with an ankle injury that required off-season surgery. Right tackle Leon Searcy, a dominant run-blocker, improved his pass protection last season. Left guard Ben Coleman is solid, although not spectacular. He can also move outside and play tackle, which he did when Boselli went down.

The other two positions are unsettled. Michael Cheever took over at center in Week 10 last season and started four games before going down with a back injury that required surgery. If he is ready by camp, he will start, and Quentin Neujahr, a free agent signed from Baltimore, will be the backup. Brian DeMarco and Rich Tylski will battle for the right guard job. DeMarco is the better run blocker, Tylski the better pass protector. But both are average at best.

Depth will be improved with Neujahr, Jeff Novak, Todd Fordham and rookie John Wade in reserve.

Jacksonville Jaguars

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
8	Brunell, Mark	6-1/214	9-17-70	6	Washington	T-GB/95	14/14
15	Matthews, Steve	6-3/227	10-13-70	3	Memphis State	W-KC/97	2/1
12	Quinn, Jonathon	6-5/242	2-27-75	R	Middle Tennessee State	D3/98	—

Running Backs

22	Banks, Tavian	5-10/198	2-17-74	R	Iowa	D4a/98	—
43	McLeod, Kevin (FB)	6-0/242	10-17-74	R	Auburn	D6b/98	—
39	Parker, Chris	5-11/213	12-31-72	2	Marshall	FA/97	1/0
31	Shelton, Daimon	6-0/251	9-15-72	2	Cal State Sacramento	D6/97	13/0
33	Stewart, James	6-1/224	12-27-71	4	Tennessee	D1b/95	16/5
28	Taylor, Fred	6-0/228	6-27-76	R	Florida	D1a/98	—

Receivers

84	Barlow, Reggie	6-11/191	1-22-73	3	Alabama State	D4/96	16/0
85	Griffith, Rich (TE)	6-5/260	7-31-69	5	Arizona	FA/95	16/1
80	Jackson, Willie	6-1/204	8-16-71	5	Florida	ED/95	16/1
88	Jones, Damon (TE)	6-5/272	9-18-74	2	Southern Illinois	D5/97	11/3
87	McCardell, Keenan	6-1/184	1-6-70	7	UNLV	FA/96	16/16
83	Mitchell, Pete (TE)	6-2/238	10-9-71	4	Boston College	T-Mia/95	16/12
81	Moore, Will	6-1/185	2-21-70	3	Texas Southern	FA/97	11/0
19	Ross, Jermaine	6-0/191	4-27-71	4	Purdue	FA/98	4/0*
82	Smith, Jimmy	6-1/205	2-9-69	6	Jackson State	FA/95	16/16
86	Whitted, Alvis	5-11/187	9-4-74	R	North Carolina State	D7a/98	—

Offensive Linemen

71	Boselli, Tony (T)	6-7/322	4-17-72	4	USC	D1a/95	12/12
63	Cheever, Michael (C)	6-4/295	6-24-73	3	Georgia Tech	D2b/96	6/4
62	Coleman, Ben (G)	6-5/627	5-18-71	6	Wake Forest	W-Ari/95	16/16
73	DeMarco, Brian (G)	6-7/329	4-9-72	4	Michigan State	D2a/95	14/5
78	Fordham, Todd (G)	6-5/303	10-9-73	2	Florida State	FA/97	1/0
65	Neujahr, Quentin (C)	6-4/305	1-30-71	4	Kansas State	FA/98	9/7*
67	Novak, Jeff (G)	6-6/292	7-27-67	5	SW Texas State	ED/95	7/2
72	Searcy, Leon (T)	6-3/316	12-21-69	7	Miami (Fla.)	FA/96	16/16
76	Tylski, Rich (G)	6-5/306	2-27-71	3	Utah State	W-NE/95	13/13
66	Wade, John (C)	6-5/293	1-25-75	R	Marshall	D5/98	—

Defensive Linemen

90	Brackens, Tony (E)	6-4/258	12-26-74	3	Texas	D2a/96	15/3
92	Davey, Don (T)	6-4/270	4-8-68	8	Wisconsin	FA/95	10/10
77	Deligianis, Harry (T)	6-4/302	8-4-75	R	Youngstown State	D4b/98	—
64	Jurkovic, John (T)	6-2/306	8-18-67	8	Eastern Illinois	FA/96	3/3
56	Lageman, Jeff (E)	6-6/265	7-18-67	10	Virginia	FA/95	16/16
91	Payne, Seth (T)	6-4/292	2-12-75	2	Cornell	D4/97	12/5
94	Pritchett, Kelvin (T)	6-3/300	10-24-69	8	Mississippi	FA/95	8/5
75	Robinson, Dwayne (T)	6-4/290	8-26-75	1	Virginia Union	FA/98	0/0*
99	Smeenge, Joel (E)	6-6/270	4-1-68	9	Western Michigan	FA/95	16/0
98	Threats, Jabbar (E)	6-5/264	4-26-75	2	Michigan State	FA/97	1/0
93	White, Jose (T)	6-3/274	3-2-73	2	Howard	FA/97	3/0
96	Williams, Lamanzer (E)	6-4/276	11-17-74	R	Minnesota	D6a/98	—
97	Wynn, Renaldo (T)	6-3/290	9-3-74	2	Notre Dame	D1/97	16/8

Linebackers

52	Boyer, Brant	6-1/230	6-27-71	5	Arizona	FA/96	16/2
54	Hamilton, James	6-5/238	4-17-74	2	North Carolina	D3/97	9/0
51	Hardy, Kevin	6-4/249	7-24-73	3	Illinois	D1/96	13/11
59	Hines, Tyrone	6-1/244	3-14-73	1	Tennessee	FA/98	0/0*
57	Kopp, Jeff	6-3/245	7-8-71	4	USC	FA/96	16/3
55	McManus, Tom	6-2/255	7-30-70	4	Boston College	FA/95	0/0
95	Paup, Bryce	6-5/247	2-29-68	9	Northern Iowa	FA/98	16/16*
50	Robinson, Eddie	6-1/233	4-13-70	7	Alabama State	FA/96	16/14
58	Schwartz, Bryan	6-4/251	12-5-71	4	Augustana (S.D.)	D2b/95	16/16
53	Tolbert, Brandon	6-4/225	4-6-75	R	Georgia	D7b/98	—

Defensive Backs

25	Anderson, Curtis (CB)	6-0/203	9-29-73	2	Pittsburgh	FA/97	9/0
21	Beasley, Aaron (CB)	6-0/196	7-7-73	3	West Virginia	D3/96	9/7
20	Darius, Donovin (S)	6-1/213	8-12-75	R	Syracuse	D1b/98	—
45	Davis, Travis (S)	6-0/204	1-10-73	4	Notre Dame	FA/95	16/16
26	Devine, Kevin (CB)	5-9/177	12-11-74	2	California	FA/97	12/0
27	Figures, Deon (CB)	6-0/195	1-10-70	6	Colorado	FA/97	16/12
37	Hudson, Chris (S)	5-10/204	10-6-71	4	Colorado	D3/95	16/16
32	Logan, Mike (S)	6-0/206	9-15-74	2	West Virginia	D2/97	11/0
29	Parker, Ricky (S)	6-1/209	12-4-74	2	San Diego State	FA/97	12/0
23	Taylor, Cordell (CB)	5-11/192	12-22-73	R	Hampton	D2/98	—
41	Thomas, Dave (CB)	6-3/214	8-25-68	6	Tennessee	ED/95	16/15

Specialists

4	Barker, Bryan (P)	6-2/200	6-28-64	9	Santa Clara	FA/97	16/0
1	Hollis, Mike (K)	5-7/178	5-22-72	4	Idaho	FA/95	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Jason Baker, OT; Pierre Brilliant, OT; James Clyburn, DT; Isaac Curtis, TE; Damon Dunn, WR; Todd Floyd, WR; Winfield Garnett, DT; Ron Harrison, CB; Jason Lawson, FB; Jamie Martin, QB; Mark Nori, G; Heron O'Neal, CB; Dwayne Robinson, DT; Justin Skinner, K; Derek Strey, LB; Reginald Swinton, WR; Malcolm Thomas, RB; Mark Thomas, TE; Tra Thomas, S; Steve Zahursky, OT.

*—Not with Jaguars in 1997.

JAGUARS

Jacksonville OFFENSE

F. Taylor Stewart (RB)

Sheldon McLeod (FB)

K: Hollis
P: Barker
KR: Barlow
PR: Barlow

Smith Jackson (WR)

Boselli Coleman (LT)

Coleman Novak (LG)

(QB) Brunell Matthews
(C) Cheever Neujahr (C)

DeMarco Tytski (RG)

Searcy DeMarco (RT)

Jones Mitchell (TE)

McCardell Barlow (WR)

Figures Thomas (CB)

Brackens Threats (RE)

Jurkovic Davey (RT)

Wynn Pritchett (LT)

Lageman Smeenge (LE)

Beasley C. Taylor (CB)

Hardy Boyer (WLB)

Schwartz McManus (MLB)

Paup Kopp (SLB)

Darius Hudson (FS)

Davis Logan (SS)

Jacksonville DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Quentin Neujahr, C (FA/Ravens); Bryce Paup, LB (FA/Bills).

Key losses: Dana Hall, S (released); Ty Hallock, FB (FA/Bears); Natrone Means, RB (FA/Chargers); Clyde Simmons, DE (released/Bengals).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Fred Taylor	RB	Florida
1st	Donovin Darius	DB	Syracuse
2nd	Cordell Taylor	DB	Hampton
3rd	Jonathan Quinn	QB	Middle Tennessee
4th	Tavian Banks	RB	Iowa
4th	Harry Deligianis	DT	Youngstown State
5th	John Wade	C	Marshall
6th	Lemanzer Williams	DE	Minnesota
6th	Kevin McLeod	RB	Auburn
7th	Alvis Whitted	WR	North Carolina State
7th	Brandon Tolbert	LB	Georgia

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	None	
1994	None	
1995	OT Tony Boselli	Starter with Jaguars
	RB James Stewart	Reserve with Jaguars
1996	LB Kevin Hardy	Starter with Jaguars
1997	DT Renaldo Wynn	Starter with Jaguars

Coaching Staff

Coach: Tom Coughlin. **Offensive staff:** Pete Carmichael (wide receivers) • Fred Hoaglin (tight ends) • Jerald Ingram

(running backs) • Mike Maser (offensive line) • Chris Palmer (offensive coordinator). **Defensive staff:** Perry Fewell (secondary) • Dick Jauron (defensive coordinator) • John Pease (defensive line) • Lucious Selmon (outside linebackers) • Steve Szabo (inside linebackers). **Others:** Joe Baker (assistant special teams) • Greg Finnegan (assistant strength and conditioning) • Jerry Palmieri (strength and conditioning) • Larry Pasquale (special teams coordinator).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 11-5 (2nd in AFC Central); 6-2 in division; 9-3 in conference; 7-1 at home; 4-4 on road.

1997 playoff record: Lost to Broncos, 42-17, in AFC wild-card game.

Coughlin's regular-season record: 24-24 in three seasons with Jaguars.

Coughlin's postseason record: 2-2 in two appearances with Jaguars.

Last time missed playoffs: 1995.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*339	4	7
Rushing offense	*107.5	9	18
Passing offense	*231.5	3	4
Scoring offense	394	2	3
Total defense	*327.4	10	23
Rushing defense	*108.4	8	13
Passing defense	*219	11	24
Scoring defense	318	7	15
Takeaways	29	T6	T13
Giveaways	20	T1	T2
Turnover differential	9	4	T6
Sacks	48	T2	T6
Sacks allowed	40	9	15

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

No team scored more points inside the red zone last season than the Jaguars did:

Team	Points inside the 20
Jacksonville	300
Green Bay	284
San Francisco	275
Pittsburgh	268
Denver	271

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Chicago	12:01
Sept. 13	KANSAS CITY	1:01
Sept. 20	BALTIMORE	4:15
Sept. 27	at Tennessee	12:01
Oct. 4	Open date	
Oct. 12	MIAMI (Mon.)	8:20
Oct. 18	at Buffalo	1:01
Oct. 25	at Denver	2:15
Nov. 1	at Baltimore	1:01
Nov. 8	CINCINNATI	1:01
Nov. 15	TAMPA BAY	4:15
Nov. 22	at Pittsburgh	1:01
Nov. 29	at Cincinnati	1:01
Dec. 6	DETROIT	1:01
Dec. 13	TENNESSEE	1:01
Dec. 20	at Minnesota	7:20
Dec. 28	PITTSBURGH (Mon.)	8:20

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 7TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Baltimore	W	28-27
Sept. 7	N.Y. GIANTS	W	40-13
Sept. 14	Open date		
Sept. 22	PITTSBURGH	W	30-21
Sept. 28	at Washington	L	12-24
Oct. 5	CINCINNATI	W	21-13
Oct. 12	PHILADELPHIA	W	38-21
Oct. 19	at Dallas	L	22-26
Oct. 26	at Pittsburgh (OT)	L	17-23
Nov. 2	at Tennessee	W	30-24
Nov. 9	KANSAS CITY	W	24-10
Nov. 16	TENNESSEE	W	17-9
Nov. 23	at Cincinnati	L	26-31
Nov. 30	BALTIMORE	W	29-27
Dec. 7	NEW ENGLAND	L	20-26
Dec. 14	at Buffalo	W	20-14
Dec. 21	at Oakland	W	20-9
Dec. 27	at Denver*	L	17-42

*AFC wild-card game.

Miscellaneous

Chairman: Wayne Weaver.
Stadium (capacity, surface): Alltel (73,000, grass).
Ticket information: 904-633-2000.
Flagship radio station: WOKV-AM, 690.
Training site: Alltel Stadium, Jacksonville, Fla.; 904-633-6000.



Smith has become one of the league's most potent receivers. But he had some problems dealing with double teams last season.

DEFENSE

LINE—The top three tackles—Kelvin Pritchett, Don Davey and John Jurkovic—were lost with season-ending injuries last year. That crippled the defense, but it also gave two rookies opportunities to contribute. Renaldo Wynn and Seth Payne played a great deal, and Wynn, the team's top pick in '97, showed the potential to be a solid, if not great, tackle.

Pritchett, Davey and Jurkovic are expected back, giving the team a solid five-man fight for jobs. Rookie Harry Deligianis, a fourth-round pick, also will be in the mix. But there still isn't a dominant wide body, which is a key against the run.

Outside, the numbers are not as good. End Jeff Lageman decided not to retire and will return for his final season. Lageman is a steady pass-rusher who will be more effective if his playing time is limited. Joel Smeenge will split time with Lageman.

At the other end, the team let veteran Clyde Simmons go so Brackens can be an every-down player. Brackens has excellent pass-rush skills, but he struggles against the run and needs to be more focused. Jabbar Threats will be in reserve.

LINEBACKERS—The team feels the signing of Paup away from Buffalo improves the linebackers in two areas. Paup's pass-rush abilities—he also will be used as an end—will help free up Brackens and Hardy. Hardy struggled in '97, after a solid rookie season, and the team feels a position change will help jump-start his game. He will move to the weakside and replace Eddie Robinson, who was not big enough to take the pounding the weakside 'backer takes in this defense.

Bryan Schwartz did not play well in the middle last season after returning from a torn ACL. Schwartz has potential, and the team feels a year removed from the injury will help his game, but there are some who question whether he can return to his pre-injury form. If he can't,

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	B
Offensive backfield:	B-	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	B-	Secondary:	C
Receivers:	A	Special teams:	C

Tom McManus will be ready to take over. But McManus also is coming off a torn ACL.

James Hamilton, Jeff Kopp and Brant Boyer will provide depth.

SECONDARY—Several players will compete for jobs here, but none can be classified as stars. Beasley, who had a solid rookie season in '96 but spent most of last season recovering from a broken hip, likely will be the left cornerback. He has solid cover skills and looked as good at the team's minicamp in May as he has at any time in his Jaguars' career. He will be backed up by second-round pick Cordell Taylor, a small-college product who has excellent speed but needs work on his technique.

Dave Thomas and Deon Figures will battle for the starting job on the other side. Thomas struggled last season after returning from a broken leg he suffered in 1996. He is a big corner, but has trouble in coverage. Figures played all of '97 on an ankle that required offseason surgery but is expected to be 100 percent by camp. Kevin Devine, an excellent cover guy who needs to be more physical, and Curtis Anderson will be in reserve.

The team wants an upgrade in tackling at free safety, which is why it drafted Darius in the first round. Darius is a big hitter who likely will take over for Chris Hudson. Travis Davis is the incumbent strong safety and is expected to be pushed by second-year player Mike Logan. Davis is a big hitter who struggles in coverage.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Bryan Barker and kicker Mike Hollis went to the Pro Bowl last season. Barker is an outstanding directional kicker whose leg has gotten stronger as he has gotten older. He got off to a great start last season but struggled some down the stretch. Hollis has a strong leg and led the league in scoring. Strangely, he struggles on kickoffs, which led to coverage troubles in that area.

The return game improved as the '97 season went on with the emergence of Barlow. A long glider, Barlow was used mainly as a punt returner early in the season but was inserted as a kick returner late. He will handle both roles this season.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

Among the negatives, the team opens on the road against Chicago; has a bye just four weeks into the season—the second-earliest bye it has had in four seasons; and faces a challenging, three-week stretch beginning in mid-October during which it travels to Buffalo, Denver and Baltimore. The road swing is to accommodate the Greater Jacksonville Agricultural Fair and the annual Florida-Georgia game at Alltel Stadium. How the Jaguars get through that stretch will be vital to their season.

There are some good things about the schedule. The team's potential for cold-weather games is limited to two—November 22 in Pittsburgh and December 20 in Cincinnati. Road games in Chicago, Buffalo and Denver are early enough that cold weather should not be a factor.

The Jaguars play five of their final eight games, including three of the final four, at home. They also play division opponents in six of their final nine games, including two against the Steelers (in Pittsburgh on November 22 and at home, on *Monday Night Football*, in the final game of the regular season).

BOTTOM LINE

After two consecutive trips to the playoffs—the first expansion team to make the playoffs twice in its first three seasons—the Jags appear ready to challenge for the AFC title. They first must win the division title. To do that, the team must improve its running game and run defense. With improvement in both areas, this team could be in the Super Bowl.

TSN

Pete Prisco covers the Jaguars for The Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville.



The still-developing Stewart holds the key to Steelers' ultimate success

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 1st

BY GERRY DULAC

After totaling 32 touchdowns, nearly 3,500 yards of total offense and not making the kind of rookie mistakes that cost teams games, the clock struck midnight for Kordell Stewart in the AFC championship game.

Stewart, the Steelers' first-year starting quarterback, threw two key interceptions—one deep into double coverage, the other into triple coverage—in a 24-21 loss that sent his teammates home and Denver to Super Bowl 32.

"One thing about Kordell," said Chan Gailey, Pittsburgh's offensive coordinator last season. "He won't let it bother him. He'll learn from it. And he'll be back."

Stewart is back, all right, back as the orchestrator of an offense that features four-time Pro Bowl running back Jerome Bettis and a line that, though missing its longest-serving member, still is pretty good. Stewart must find a new primary receiver and will take direction from a new offensive coordinator in '98, but his ability is limitless.

Stewart and a defense that will feature just one and maybe two new starters after a year of transition could take the Steelers past the AFC title game this season. Almost certainly, the team will add another AFC Central crown—its sixth since 1992—to coach Bill Cowher's resume.

COACHING

Cowher, 40, no longer is the best young coach in the NFL. He might be the best coach, period. He has taken the Steelers to the playoffs in each of his first six seasons, a feat accomplished previously by only Paul Brown. What's more, the Steelers have hosted three of the past four AFC championship games.

Cowher continues to use the same bold, gambling style he employed when he first broke into the league. His fiery style is embraced by his players, and he never seems to panic in the face of repeated free-agent losses. Since getting to his first AFC title game in 1994, Cowher has seen three of his top assistants depart for other teams—Dom Capers, Dick LeBeau and now Gailey, the new Cowboys coach who will be replaced by former Vikings quarterbacks coach Ray Sherman.

But the Steelers should benefit from not having to change coordinators on the other side of the ball. Jim Haslett returns for his second season running the defense, and the adjustment period is over. It showed in the second half of the season, when the defense came together as a unit.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Stewart's emergence last season gives the team hope for this season. Last year, he threw for 21 touchdowns, ran for 11 more and narrowly missed becoming only the third quarterback in league history to pass for 3,000 yards and rush for 500 in the same season. Stewart got off to a slow start, but by the quarter pole he was off and running. He had two of his best games down the stretch, in victories over Denver and New England.

The backup again will be Mike Tomczak, who begins his 14th season. Tomczak is a valuable backup who knows the system as well as the staff. He also works well with Stewart.

When he gets more experience, second-year man Mike Quinn eventually will move from third string to the No. 2 guy. The Steelers love his arm and the way he stands in the pocket.

RUNNING BACKS—Despite Stewart's talents, the Steelers will remain a run-oriented team as long as they have Bettis. Only an injury that kept him out of the season finale prevented him from setting the team's single-season rushing record last year. Bettis finished with 1,665 yards on the NFL's No. 1 rushing unit, which averaged 154.9 yards per game. In addition, Bettis comes into the season healthy, unlike last year, when a deep groin injury hampered his offseason conditioning.



As long as Bettis is on the roster, the Steelers will remain a run-oriented team. He is coming off back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons.

Bettis may have to start the season without his good friend, fullback Tim Lester, who had surgery on his shoulder and knee in the offseason and might not be ready to start practicing until at least August. If Lester, one of the league's best blocking fullbacks, is unable to begin the season, the team will plug third-year man Jon Witman into the void. Witman is such a good blocker that he often lines up as an H-back or an extra tight end.

Bettis' backup, George Jones, begins his second season as a mixed bag of goods. He had a good preseason in '97 and showed the ability to break long runs. But he had problems holding onto the ball in the regular season and it eventually cost him playing time. Look for a Bettis-like rookie, Chris Fuamatu-Ma'afala, to get a long look at No. 2 running back.

RECEIVERS—There is no doubt the team will miss Yancey Thigpen, its leading receiver two of the past three seasons. Thigpen missed about half the '96 season with an assortment of injuries but had a club-record 85 catches in 1995 and a club-record 1,398 yards receiving last year, when he made the Pro Bowl.

With Thigpen's departure, Charles Johnson will be given every opportunity to unleash his potential. Johnson is entering his fifth season, but his best season was 1996, when Thigpen was injured. Johnson caught 60 passes for 1,008 yards (16.8-yard average) that year, and

it doesn't hurt that he's Stewart's best friend on the team.

Thigpen's starting role probably will be filled by Courtney Hawkins, who had 45 receptions and three touchdowns in '97, but that depends on the development of '97 No. 2 pick Will Blackwell, who caught only 12 passes in an injury-plagued rookie season. Blackwell probably will begin the season as the No. 3 receiver, with Jahine Arnold the fourth receiver.

Tight end Mark Bruener, who was named a Pro Bowl alternate last year because of his outstanding blocking, could become more of a pass-catching threat. He had 18 catches last season, but six went for touchdowns.

LINE—This group paved the way for the league's No. 1 rushing attack and allowed just 20 sacks, including only three in the last four games of the season. But the loss of left tackle John Jackson, who signed with the Chargers as a free agent, will disrupt things a bit. Jackson, a starter since 1989, is one of the best left tackles in the league.

Jackson will be replaced by Justin Strzelczyk, who will move from right tackle because the Steelers do not want to entrust Stewart's blindside protection to young tackles Jamain Stephens and Paul Wiggins. For all intents, Stephens, a No. 1 pick in '96, has not played in two seasons. He was inactive for his rookie season. When he finally got his chance last year, in Week 15 against the Patriots, he lasted a quarter before spraining his ankle. But Stephens has such great size that the team hopes he begins to blossom this season.

The rest of the line is outstanding. Dermontti Dawson is a perennial Pro Bowl center, and left guard Will Wolford, who probably will retire after the season, has played as though he is deserving of more Pro Bowls (he has been voted to three). Wolford eventually will be replaced by No. 1 pick Alan Faneca, who probably will spend most of the season watching and learning. The other guard is Brendan Stai, a great run blocker.

The Steelers averted a possible depth problem by signing free-agent guard Roger Duffy from the Jets to replace Tom Myslinski, another free-agent departure. Duffy can play center in an emergency.

DEFENSE

LINE—This was the most improved area on the team last year. Cowher, in fact, said the play of nose tackle Joel Steed and ends Kevin Henry and Nolan Harrison was the best by a Pittsburgh defensive line since he arrived in 1992.

Steed, a 310-pound nose tackle, finally made it to the Pro Bowl after playing several years in relative obscurity. He was rewarded with a big contract in the offseason. The real surprise, though, was Henry. With the loss of Ray Seals, Henry stepped in and got better as the season progressed. He led all Steelers linemen with five sacks and 51 tackles. More important, he turned in the play of the season when he intercepted a Drew Bledsoe pass that set up the tying touchdown in a 24-21 overtime victory at New England.

Harrison, a free-agent acquisition last season from the Raiders, got off to a slow start while adjusting to playing in a 3-4 set. But by mid-November, he started playing with a recklessness that resulted in a lot of pressure on the quarterback and several tackles for loss.

Mike Vrabel, who came up with a big playoff sack against Bledsoe, was moved to right outside linebacker during the offseason. That weakens the line, but it allows Vrabel to play at a more comfortable

Pittsburgh Steelers

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
11	Quinn, Mike	6-3/220	4-15-74	2	Stephen F. Austin	FA/97	1/0
10	Stewart, Kordell	6-1/212	10-16-72	4	Colorado	D2/95	16/16
18	Tomczak, Mike	6-1/207	10-23-62	14	Ohio State	FA/93	16/0

Running Backs

36	Bettis, Jerome	5-11/243	2-16-72	6	Notre Dame	T-STL/96	15/15
45	Fuamatu-Ma'afala, Chris	5-11/252	3-4-77	R	Utah	D6a/98	—
33	Huntley, Richard	5-11/224	9-18-72	2	Winston-Salem (N.C.) St.	FA/98	0/0*
43	Jones, George	5-9/204	12-31-73	2	San Diego State	D5b/97	16/1
35	King, Carlos (FB)	6-0/235	11-27-73	R	North Carolina State	D4b/98	—
34	Lester, Tim (FB)	5-10/238	6-15-68	7	Eastern Kentucky	FA/95	16/13
25	McAfee, Fred	5-10/198	6-20-68	8	Mississippi College	FA/94	14/0
38	Witman, Jon (FB)	6-1/240	6-1-72	3	Penn State	D3b/96	16/2

Receivers

86	Adams, Mike	5-11/184	3-25-74	2	Texas	D7/97	6/0
40	Arnold, Jahine	6-0/187	6-19-73	3	Fresno State	D4b/96	0/0
82	Bailey, Henry	5-8/176	2-28-73	3	UNLV	FA/97	0/0
89	Blackwell, Will	6-0/184	7-9-75	2	San Diego State	D2/97	14/0
84	Botkin, Kirk (TE)	6-3/245	3-19-71	4	Arkansas	W-NO/96	13/1
87	Bruener, Mark (TE)	6-4/258	9-16-72	4	Washington	D1/95	16/16
19	Coleman, Andre	5-9/165	9-19-72	5	Kansas State	FA/97	10/0
88	Hawkins, Courtney	5-9/183	12-12-69	7	Michigan State	FA/97	15/3
83	Holliday, Corey	6-2/208	1-31-71	4	North Carolina	FA/95	2/0
81	Johnson, Charles	6-0/195	1-3-72	5	Colorado	D1/94	13/11
85	Lyons, Mitch (TE)	6-5/265	5-13-70	6	Michigan State	FA/97	10/3
17	Marsh, Curtis	6-2/206	11-24-70	4	Utah	FA/97	5/0
46	Sadowski, Troy (TE)	6-5/252	12-8-65	9	Georgia	FA/97	5/0
15	Ward, Hines	6-0/194	3-8-76	R	Georgia	D3b/98	—

Offensive Linemen

78	Conrad, Chris (T)	6-6/301	5-27-75	R	Fresno State	D3a/98	—
45	Dawson, Dermontti (C)	6-2/288	6-17-65	11	Kentucky	D2/88	16/16
62	Duffy, Roger (G/C)	6-3/305	7-16-67	9	Penn State	FA/98	15/15*
65	Faneca, Alan (G)	6-5/322	12-7-76	R	LSU	D1/98	—
68	Stai, Brenden (G)	6-4/305	3-30-72	4	Nebraska	D3/95	10/9
67	Stephens, Jamain (T)	6-6/336	1-9-74	3	North Carolina A&T	D1/96	7/1
73	Strzelczyk, Justin (G)	6-6/305	8-18-68	9	Maine	D11/90	14/14
66	Sweeney, Jim (C)	6-4/298	8-8-62	15	Pittsburgh	FA/96	16/1
79	Wiggins, Paul (T)	6-3/307	8-17-73	2	Oregon	D3a/97	1/0
77	Wolford, Will (T)	6-5/300	5-18-64	14	Vanderbilt	FA/96	16/16

Defensive Linemen

98	Gibson, Oliver (T)	6-3/298	3-15-72	4	Notre Dame	D4a/95	16/0
74	Harrison, Nolan (E)	6-5/280	1-25-69	8	Indiana	FA/97	16/16
76	Henry, Kevin (E)	6-4/282	10-23-68	6	Mississippi State	D4/93	16/16
97	Manuel, Rod (E)	6-5/290	10-8-74	2	Oklahoma	D6b/97	1/0
55	Olson, Ryan (T)	6-2/275	6-27-75	R	Colorado	D6b/98	—
71	Roy, Orpheus (E)	6-4/290	1-21-74	3	Florida State	D6a/96	16/0
69	Rubio, Angel (E)	6-2/300	4-12-75	R	Southeast Missouri St.	D7/98	—
94	Staat, Jeremy (T)	6-5/300	10-10-76	R	Arizona State	D2/98	—
93	Steed, Joel (NT)	6-2/310	2-17-69	7	Colorado	D3/92	16/16
96	Vrabel, Mike (E)	6-4/275	8-14-75	2	Ohio State	D3b/97	15/0

Linebackers

53	Conley, Steven	6-5/235	1-18-72	3	Arkansas	D3a/96	16/0
51	Emmons, Carlos	6-5/246	9-3-73	3	Arkansas State	D7/96	5/0
57	Fiala, John	6-2/235	11-25-73	2	Washington	FA/98	0/0*
92	Gildon, Jason	6-3/245	7-31-72	5	Oklahoma State	D3a/94	16/16
50	Holmes, Earl	6-2/246	4-28-73	3	Florida A&M	D4a/96	16/16
54	Jones, Donta	6-2/234	8-27-72	4	Nebraska	D4b/95	16/4
99	Kirkland, Levon	6-1/274	2-17-69	7	Clemson	D2/92	16/16
95	Lloyd, Greg	6-2/235	5-26-65	12	Fort Valley (Ga.) State	D6b/87	12/12
44	Ravotti, Eric	6-2/250	3-16-71	4	Penn State	FA/98	0/0*

Defensive Backs

27	Brown, J.B. (CB)	6-0/191	1-5-67	10	Maryland	FA/97	13/0
29	Brown, Lance (CB)	6-2/200	2-2-72	2	Indiana	FA/98	0/0*
41	Flowers, Lethon (CB)	6-0/213	1-14-73	4	Georgia Tech	D5a/95	10/0
37	Lake, Carnell (CB/S)	6-1/210	7-15-67	10	UCLA	D2/89	16/16
24	Oldham, Chris (CB)	5-9/200	10-26-68	8	Oregon	FA/95	16/0
29	Perry, Darren (S)	5-11/196	12-29-68	7	Penn State	D8a/92	16/16
30	Scott, Chad (CB)	6-1/203	9-6-74	2	Maryland	D1/97	13/9
23	Simmons, Jason (CB)	5-8/188	3-30-76	R	Arizona State	D5/98	—
26	Townsend, Deshea (CB)	5-10/180	9-8-75	R	Alabama	D4a/98	—
20	Washington, Dewayne (CB)	6-0/190	12-27-72	5	North Carolina State	FA/98	16/16*

Specialists

9	Johnson, Norm (K)	6-2/202	5-31-60	16	UCLA	FA/97	16/0
4	Miller, Josh (P)	6-3/215	7-14-70	3	Arizona	FA/96	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

DeAuntae Brown, CB; Morocco Brown, LB; Matt Cushing, TE; Aaron DeLaTorre, NT; Mike Evans, OT; Matt George, K/P; Pete Gonzalez, QB; Matt Harper, DE; Aaron Henne, G; John Jenkins, DB; David McCann, FB; Seamus Murphy, C.
*—Not with Steelers in 1997.

Steelers

Pittsburgh OFFENSE

Bettis Jones RB
Strzelczyk Conrad LT
Wolford Faneca LG
Stewart Tomczak (QB)
Dawson Sweeney (C)
Stai Duffy RG
Stephens Wiggins RT
Bruener Lyons TE
C. Johnson Blackwell WR
Lester Witman FB
K: N. Johnson
P: Miller
KR: Blackwell
PR: Arnold

Pittsburgh DEFENSE

Hawkins Arnold WR
Lake Simmons CB
Harrison Royce RE
Steed Gibson NT
Henry Staat LE
Washington Townsend CB
Vrabel Lloyd OLB
Holmes Olson RILB
Kirkland Ravotti OLB
Gildon Conley OLB
Perry Flowers FS
Bell Flowers SS
LILB

Probable starters listed on top

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Roger Duffy, G/C (FA/Jets); Dewayne Washington, CB (FA/Vikings).

Key losses: John Jackson, OT (FA/Chargers); Tom Myslinski, G (FA/Colts); Jerry Olsavsky, LB (FA/Bengals); Yancey Thigpen, WR (FA/Oilers); Donnell Woolford, CB (released).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Alan Faneca	G	LSU
2nd	Jeremy Staat	DT	Arizona State
3rd	Chris Conrad	T	Fresno State
3rd	Hines Ward	WR	Georgia
4th	Deshea Townsend	CB	Alabama
4th	Carlos King	FB	North Carolina State
5th	Jason Simmons	CB	Arizona State
6th	Chris Fuamatu-Ma'afala	RB	Utah
6th	Ryan Olson	LB	Colorado
7th	Angel Rubio	DE	Southeast Missouri St.

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	CB Deon Figures	Starter with Jaguars
1994	WR Charles Johnson	Starter with Steelers
1995	TE Mark Bruener	Starter with Steelers
1996	OT Jamain Stephens	Starter with Steelers
1997	CB Chad Scott	On IR with Steelers

Coaching staff

Coach: Bill Cowher. **Offensive staff:** David Culley (wide receivers) • Dick Hoak (running backs) • Mike Mularkey (tight ends) • Ray Sherman (offensive coordinator) • Kent Stephenson (offensive line). **Defensive staff:** Mike Archer (linebackers) • Jim Haslett (defensive coordinator) • Tim

Lewis (defensive backs) • John Mitchell (defensive line).
Others: Ron Zook (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 11-5 (1st in AFC Central); 6-2 in division; 9-3 in conference; 7-1 at home; 4-4 on road.

1997 playoff record: Defeated Patriots, 7-6, in divisional game; lost to Broncos, 24-21, in AFC championship game.

Cowher's regular-season record: 64-32 in six seasons with Steelers.

Cowher's postseason record: 5-6 in six appearances with Steelers.

Team record past five years: 53-27 (.663, ranks 4th in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1991.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*346.4	3	6
Rushing offense	*154.9	1	1
Passing offense	*191.4	12	23
Scoring offense	372	4	7
Total defense	*294.1	2	6
Rushing defense	*82.4	1	1
Passing defense	*211.7	6	18
Scoring defense	307	5	11
Takeaways	34	T1	T4
Giveaways	33	13	24
Turnover differential	1	T8	T14
Sacks	48	T2	T6
Sacks allowed	20	1	1

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

How big an impact has Jerome Bettis had in Pittsburgh? Consider that it has taken him just two seasons to crack the team's career top 10 rushing list.

Player	Seasons	Yards	Avg.
Franco Harris	12	11,950	4.1
John Henry Johnson	6	4,383	4.3
Frank Pollard	9	3,989	4.2
Dick Hoak	10	3,965	3.5
Barry Foster	5	3,943	4.3
Rocky Bleier	12	3,865	4.2
Walter Abercrombie	6	3,343	4.0
Fran Rogel	8	3,271	3.6
Merril Hoge	7	3,115	3.8
Jerome Bettis	2	3,096	4.4

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Baltimore	1:01
Sept. 13	CHICAGO	1:01
Sept. 20	at Miami	1:01
Sept. 27	SEATTLE	4:05
Oct. 4	Open date	
Oct. 11	at Cincinnati	1:01
Oct. 18	BALTIMORE	1:01
Oct. 26	at Kansas City (Mon.)	7:20
Nov. 1	TENNESSEE	1:01
Nov. 9	GREEN BAY (Mon.)	8:20
Nov. 15	at Tennessee	12:01
Nov. 22	JACKSONVILLE	1:01
Nov. 26	at Detroit (Thanks.)	12:35
Dec. 6	NEW ENGLAND	1:01
Dec. 13	at Tampa Bay	1:01
Dec. 20	CINCINNATI	1:01
Dec. 28	at Jacksonville (Mon.)	8:20

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 1ST.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	DALLAS	L	7-37
Sept. 7	WASHINGTON	W	14-13
Sept. 14	Open date		
Sept. 22	at Jacksonville	L	21-30
Sept. 28	TENNESSEE	W	37-24
Oct. 5	at Baltimore	W	42-34
Oct. 12	INDIANAPOLIS	W	24-22
Oct. 19	at Cincinnati	W	26-10
Oct. 26	JACKSONVILLE (OT)	W	23-17
Nov. 3	at Kansas City	L	10-13
Nov. 9	BALTIMORE	W	37-0
Nov. 16	CINCINNATI	W	20-3
Nov. 23	at Philadelphia	L	20-23
Nov. 30	at Arizona (OT)	W	26-20
Dec. 7	DENVER	W	35-24
Dec. 13	at New England (OT)	W	24-21
Dec. 21	at Tennessee	L	6-16
Jan. 3	NEW ENGLAND*	W	7-6
Jan. 11	at Denver†	L	21-24

*AFC divisional playoff game.

†AFC championship game.

Miscellaneous

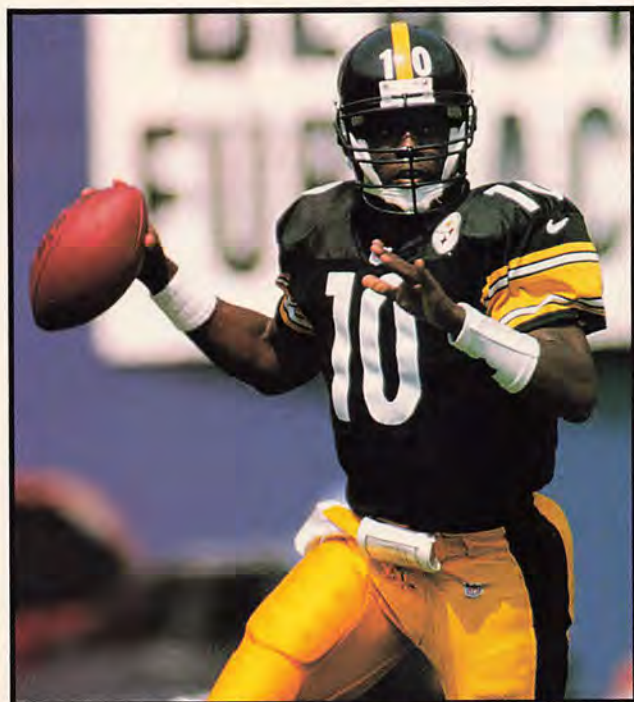
President: Daniel M. Rooney.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Three Rivers (58,600, artificial).

Ticket information: 412-323-0300.

Flagship radio station: WTAE-AM, 1250.

Training site: St. Vincent College, Latrobe, Pa.; 412-539-8515.



Stewart narrowly missed becoming only the third quarterback in NFL history to pass for 3,000 yards and rush for 500 in the same season.

weight (250) than last season, when he was 275. He will be replaced by rookie Jeremy Staat, a second-round pick who could see action as the rush end in third-down situations.

LINEBACKERS—The biggest question here is Greg Lloyd, a five-time Pro Bowl selection who hasn't played a full season in three years. Lloyd, 33, missed the final four games last year with an ankle injury that developed into a severe staph infection. He has been given a clean bill of health, but he spent most of the offseason trying to regain weight and strength. It took Lloyd until at least midseason last year to begin looking even mildly like the player he was before his torn patellar injury.

Lloyd could be let go because of his high salary-cap figure and replaced by Vrabel, who received a lot of playing time toward the end of last season. Still, the unit remains the strength of the defense, mainly because of inside man Levon Kirkland, who might be the best linebacker in the NFL. Kirkland is a 274-pound monster who stuffs the run inside and has the speed and agility to cover running backs and tight ends downfield.

His inside partner is Earl Holmes, who earned a starting berth in only his second season and played spectacularly at times. Holmes' arrival is the reason Jerry Olsavsky requested—and was granted—his release. Olsavsky's departure left the team without a backup inside linebacker. The Steelers tried to rectify the problem by drafting Colorado nose tackle Ryan Olson in the sixth round and converting him into a Kirkland-esque inside linebacker. In addition, they re-signed Eric Ravotti, a player they cut right before the start of last season.

The other outside starter is steady Jason Gildon, who is a good pass rusher. Steven Conley is an athletic reserve on the outside.

SECONDARY—This was supposed to be the year Carnell Lake, probably the best strong safety in football, would return to the position full time after bouncing between safety and cornerback the past three years. Alas, those plans were put on hold in May, when cornerback Chad Scott tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee in an off-season workout. It's possible Scott, who started eight games at cornerback as a rookie last season, could miss the season. The injury is similar to the one that felled former Steeler Rod Woodson for all but two games three seasons ago.

In addition to keeping their fingers crossed on Scott, the Steelers also are hoping this year's free-agent cornerback, Dewayne Washington, turns out better than last year's, Donnell Woolford. Pittsburgh's pass

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	A	Defensive line:	B-
Offensive backfield:	B+	Linebackers:	A-
Offensive line:	B	Secondary:	C
Receivers:	B-	Special teams:	D

defense ranked 18th in the NFL last season partly because the secondary was shuffled more times than a Las Vegas card deck. Woolford began the year as the starting left cornerback but kept getting beat on the same hitch-and-go move, was benched late in the season and was released in June. The team hopes Washington, a four-year starter with the Vikings, will be a more beneficial addition.

As a precaution, the team drafted two cornerbacks in the first five rounds—Alabama's Deshea Townsend and Arizona State's Jason Simmons. Both are smallish by Steelers standards but should help provide depth at corner after the free-agent loss of Randy Fuller.

Myron Bell will replace Lake at strong safety and Darren Perry handles free safety.

SPECIAL TEAMS

This has been an area of concern for several years. The Steelers did not block a punt, field goal or extra point last season, and they forced only two fumbles, one by their kicker, Norm Johnson. And their punter, Josh Miller, was so erratic late in the season that he had seven punts of 26 yards or less in the last seven games. On top of that, their punt coverage unit was among the worst in the NFL, allowing an average of 11.8 yards per return.

So, what's the good news?

Well, Johnson. He was re-signed by the Steelers after the man they signed to replace him, Chris Jacke, was injured in the final '97 pre-season game. All Johnson did during the regular season was convert 22-of-25 field-goal attempts, including the overtime winner at New England. He's back, guaranteed of his job this time.

But there are other concerns. Blackwell was leading the NFL in kick returns until he injured his knee in midseason and missed two games. He never recaptured his previous form. The team also will try to find a punt returner from among three players who missed the '97 season with knee injuries—Arnold and fellow receivers Michael Adams and Henry Bailey. Pittsburgh's longest punt return last year was 30 yards, by Hawkins.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

Unlike last year, when the Steelers opened against the Cowboys, Redskins and Jaguars and started 1-2, there's a good chance for a better start this season. Three of their first four opponents were non-playoff teams in 1997. They open at Baltimore, then play the Bears at home, the Dolphins on the road and the Seahawks at home. After an open date, the Steelers play at Cincinnati and host Baltimore. That gives them a good opportunity for a fast start—say, 5-1—before the schedule begins to toughen.

In the three weeks that follow, they play two difficult Monday night games—at Kansas City on October 26 and home against the Packers on November 9.

Three of the Steelers' last five games are on the road, all against '97 playoff teams. They play at Detroit on Thanksgiving and at Tampa Bay two weeks later. The other road game is against the Jaguars, whom the Steelers have never beaten in Jacksonville.

BOTTOM LINE

With most of the NFL's top rushing defense returning and another year of experience for Stewart, the Steelers will be favored by many to represent the AFC in the Super Bowl. At the least, Cowher can start clearing space in his trophy case for another division title.

TSN

Gerry Dulac covers the Steelers for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.



No longer road warriors, Oilers expect growth—and no excuses

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 3rd

BY JEFF LEGWOLD

Finally, the Oilers' 210-mile commute is over, which means things are looking up.

After practicing in Nashville and playing in Memphis last season, the Oilers will call Nashville's Vanderbilt Stadium home this season while their new digs are being built. That means no half-full Liberty Bowl, no families on buses and no lack of a home-field advantage for the first time since the team announced it was moving from Houston to Tennessee in 1995.

"And that means no excuses," coach Jeff Fisher said. "I have made that clear. All of that nonsense is behind us, those problems have been solved, the playing field is level for the most part and there's no excuses. No excuses."

After consecutive 8-8 seasons, back-to-back near misses at playoff berths and too many close games that got away (nine losses by seven or fewer points in the past two years, 16 losses by seven or fewer over the past three seasons), Fisher started to ratchet up expectations from the time the team finalized its deal to play home games in Nashville.

The team spent freely in free agency—\$21 million to receiver Yancey Thigpen as well as signing tight end Jackie Harris (Buccaneers) and punter Craig Hentrich (Packers)—and has removed most of the off-field distractions that plagued it since it began breaking away from Houston in 1995. A new stadium in Nashville opens in 1999, and the club would love to enter its new home coming off a postseason appearance.

"(Fisher) has made it clear to everyone," Pro Bowl safety Blaine Bishop said. "We'll make plays, we'll get things done or we'll sit. People in this locker room know they better get on their horse and ride or they'll be left behind because someone else will be riding in their place."

COACHING

For the first time in Fisher's tenure, no changes were made on the staff. Defensive quality control coach Jerry Gray was pursued by the Jaguars but stayed, and nobody got fired.

Fisher, who has kept this team together during tough times, gets his first test with a mostly full cupboard. He has an improved roster, a home field and his best chance for his first trip to the playoffs as coach.

The passing attack has received needed attention. Offensive coordinator Les Steckel is trying to add balance to keep opposing defensive coordinators from piling on Eddie George. But Steckel needs to get some of the needless complication out of the playbook and decide what he likes and what he doesn't need.

One thing coaches need to do is make better use of the exhibition season. Last year, they ran very little of the team's base offense and defense and seemed to suffer for it. In addition, this staff has done better in games outside of the AFC Central—6-2 last year—and needs to compete better against its brethren to fulfill postseason dreams.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—No player will factor more into this team's success—or lack of it—than Steve McNair. He lost confidence in an unproductive group of receivers last season and became impatient down the stretch. Furthermore, McNair ran too often in hopes of sparking the offense and fumbled too much. He has spent most of the offseason in Nashville and has looked sharp. McNair, whose demeanor is unquestioned, is a natural leader whose play with a painful clavicle injury last season earned him respect from team-



The Oilers need to find a way to keep George on the field in obvious passing situations; he caught just seven passes last season.

mates that will last a long time.

Dave Krieg, who throws well and is comfortable in the system, is a valuable backup who has provided McNair with a library of information. James Ritchey, who struggled with Barcelona in NFL Europe, will battle in camp with Notre Dame's Ron Powlus, who signed as a free agent, for the No. 3 role.

RUNNING BACKS—Even with George's success in his first two seasons, there still has been reluctance to involve him all of the way. He caught just seven passes last season and often left the field on third down. Call it packaging, call it personnel groupings, call it whatever—it doesn't make much sense.

Rodney Thomas is a wonderful person and a quality back. He is one of the most underrated players in the league and may have the best work ethic on the team. Instead of resting George occasionally, the Oilers would be better served by allowing Thomas to play an entire

series at a time.

Spencer George and Mike Archie will see most of their time on special teams. Free agent Ricky Whittle, with the Saints in '96 but out of the league last season, is a good third-down fullback who could make the roster with a strong camp.

RECEIVERS—Last season was a litany of bad routes, dropped passes and an inability to beat single coverage. Improvement is a must from this group. Tight end Frank Wycheck is the most consistent option.

It's hoped the additions of Thigpen, who defected from the Steelers, and first-round pick Kevin Dyson will help. Both are expected to play in the base offense, with Chris Sanders being the No. 3 man if he can't fend off Dyson. Thigpen is the unquestioned No. 1 and Sanders should flourish this year outside of that label. Sanders' speed will be a bigger factor against single coverage and defenses unable to use a player with no deep help to jam him at the line.

Willie Davis' playing time will suffer the most with the additions, as his roster spot may be in jeopardy if the team doesn't keep six receivers. Derrick Mason's ability to return kicks makes him more valuable. Joey Kent can't afford the same basic formation and assignment mistakes of last season and expect to make the roster. Isaiah Mustafa, who has played well in NFL Europe, has an outside chance to make the roster.

LINE—This group may have had the best season of any last year, a testament to the ability of Mike Munchak to make the transition from player to assistant. The unit's only problem in recent seasons has been holding off pressure up the middle from blitzing teams. And with the number of zone blitz clubs in the AFC Central—Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and Baltimore, to a degree—that is no small matter.

Tackle Jon Runyan, who developed from a question mark into a remarkably consistent player, again will play the right side. The player to his left—likely Jason Layman—is the biggest question this season. Layman is physical and plays with a mean streak but has consistently battled injuries and had arthroscopic surgery on a knee and a hip during the offseason.

Kevin Donnalley created a hole at right guard when he signed a free-agent deal with the Dolphins. Fifth-round pick Benji Olson, a product of Washington, will compete at guard along with Erik Norgard.

Mark Stepnoski remains the starting center, perpetual Pro Bowler Bruce Matthews is back at left guard and Brad Hopkins has developed into one of the best left tackles in the AFC. Together, they figure to make plenty of room for Eddie George.

DEFENSE

LINE—This is an aging group that needs to produce. The biggest impact likely will come from second-year ends Pratt Lyons and Kenny Holmes. Their playing time will increase alongside tackles Henry Ford and Gary Walker and end Anthony Cook. All have been good against the run but have lacked in the pass rush. Holmes tied Walker for the team lead in sacks with seven despite only playing on third downs much of the year.

Patience is running thin with Bryant Mix, a second-round pick in '96. That's why Joe Salave'a was drafted. Salave'a was a physical, workmanlike tackle at Arizona, which is what coaches are looking for.

Tackles Mike Halapin and Josh Evans will try to

Tennessee Oilers

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
17	Krieg, Dave	6-1/202	10-20-58	19	Milton (Wis.)	FA/97	8/0
9	McNair, Steve	6-2/229	2-14-73	4	Alcorn State	D1/95	16/16
16	Ritchey, James	6-2/210	7-10-73	2	Stephen F. Austin	FA/96	1/0

Running Backs

22	Archie, Mike	5-8/211	10-14-72	3	Penn State	D7/96	5/0
27	George, Eddie	6-3/238	9-24-73	3	Ohio State	D1/96	16/16
35	George, Spencer	5-9/202	10-28-73	1	Rice	FA/97	5/0
20	Thomas, Rodney	5-10/213	3-30-73	4	Texas A&M	D3b/95	16/1
23	Whittle, Ricky	5-9/200	12-21-71	2	Oregon	FA/98	0/0*

Receivers

1	Byrd, Isaac	6-0/173	11-11-74	2	Kansas	FA/97	2/0
84	Davis, Willie	6-0/182	10-10-67	7	Central Arkansas	FA/96	16/15
	Dyson, Kevin	5-11/199	6-23-75	R	Utah	D1/98	—
81	Harris, Jackie (TE)	6-4/254	1-4-68	9	Northeast Louisiana	FA/98	12/11*
86	Kent, Joey	6-1/186	4-23-74	2	Tennessee	D2/97	12/0
85	Mason, Derrick	5-10/190	1-17-74	2	Michigan State	D4a/97	16/2
87	McKeehan, James (TE)	6-3/251	8-9-73	3	Texas A&M	FA/97	10/0
18	Mustafa, Isaiah	6-2/204	2-11-74	1	Arizona State	FA/97	0/0
80	Roan, Michael (TE)	6-3/242	8-29-72	4	Wisconsin	D4/95	14/13
85	Russell, Derek	6-0/195	6-22-69	8	Arkansas	FA/95	11/2
81	Sanders, Chris	6-1/180	5-8-72	4	Ohio State	D3a/95	15/14
82	Thigpen, Yancey	6-1/202	8-15-69	7	Winston-Salem (N.C.) St.	FA/98	16/15*
89	Wycheck, Frank (TE)	6-3/248	10-14-71	6	Maryland	W-Was/95	16/16

Offensive Linemen

71	Hayes, Melvin (T)	6-6/325	4-28-73	4	Mississippi State	D4a/95	0/0
72	Hopkins, Brad (T)	6-3/295	9-5-70	6	Illinois	D1/93	16/16
66	Layman, Jason (T)	6-5/306	7-29-73	3	Tennessee	D2b/96	13/0
	Long, Kevin (C)	6-5/296	5-2-75	R	Florida State	D7b/98	—
74	Matthews, Bruce (G)	6-5/309	8-8-61	16	USC	D1/83	16/16
64	Norgard, Erik (G)	6-1/289	11-4-65	10	Colorado	FA/90	15/0
	Olson, Benji (G)	6-4/313	6-5-75	R	Washington	D5/98	—
65	Pilgrim, Evan (G)	6-4/304	8-14-72	3	Brigham Young	FA/98	13/6*
69	Runyan, Jon (T)	6-7/316	11-27-73	3	Michigan	D4b/96	16/16
73	Sanderson, Scott (T)	6-6/278	7-25-74	2	Washington State	D3b/97	10/0
53	Stepnoski, Mark (C)	6-2/263	1-20-67	10	Pittsburgh	FA/95	16/16
76	Washington, T.J.	6-4/335	7-1-74	1	Virginia Tech	FA/97	0/0

Defensive Linemen

94	Burton, Kendrick (E)	6-5/288	9-7-73	2	Alabama	D4a/96	0/0
78	Cook, Anthony	6-3/290	5-30-72	4	South Carolina State	D2/95	16/16
92	England, Eric (E)	6-3/273	4-25-71	4	Texas A&M	FA/97	0/0
91	Evans, Josh	6-0/275	9-6-72	4	UAB	FA/95	15/0
92	Ford, Henry (E)	6-3/292	10-30-71	5	Arkansas	D1/94	16/16
93	Halapin, Mike (T)	6-4/283	7-1-73	3	Pittsburgh	FA/96	3/1
99	Holmes, Kenny (E)	6-4/270	10-24-73	2	Miami (Fla.)	D1/97	16/5
98	Lyons, Pratt (E)	6-5/281	9-17-74	2	Troy State	D4b/97	16/0
97	Mix, Bryant (E)	6-3/293	7-28-72	3	Alcorn State	D2a/96	1/0
90	Roberson, James (E)	6-3/275	5-3-71	3	Florida State	FA/96	15/11
	Salave'a, Joe (T)	6-4/285	3-23-75	R	Arizona	D4/98	—
96	Walker, Gary (E)	6-2/288	2-28-73	4	Auburn	D5/95	15/15

Linebackers

58	Bowden, Joe	5-11/224	2-25-70	7	Oklahoma	D5a/92	16/16
51	Hall, Lemanski	6-0/230	11-24-70	4	Alabama	D7/94	16/2
57	Jones, Lenoy	6-1/232	9-25-74	3	TCU	FA/96	16/0
50	Killens, Terry	6-1/227	3-24-74	3	Penn State	D3/96	16/0
56	Marts, Lonnie	6-2/241	11-10-68	9	Tulane	FA/97	14/14
	Sprotte, Jimmy	6-3/245	10-2-74	R	Arizona	D7a/98	—
59	Stallings, Dennis	6-0/234	5-25-74	2	Illinois	D6/97	13/0
52	Wortham, Barron	5-11/240	11-1-69	5	Texas-El Paso	D6b/94	16/16

Defensive Backs

23	Bishop, Blaine (S)	5-9/197	7-24-70	6	Ball State	D8/93	14/14
33	Dorsett, Anthony (CB)	5-11/203	9-14-73	3	Pittsburgh	D6/96	16/0
24	Jackson, Steve (CB)	5-8/188	4-8-69	8	Purdue	D3a/91	12/6
29	Lewis, Darryll (CB)	5-9/186	12-16-68	8	Arizona	D2b/91	16/14
28	McCullough, George	5-10/187	2-18-75	1	Baylor	D5/97	2/0
31	Robertson, Marcus (S)	5-11/202	10-2-69	8	Iowa State	D4b/91	14/14
	Rolle, Samari (CB)	5-11/173	8-10-76	R	Florida State	D2/98	—
	Sidney, Dainon (CB)	6-0/186	5-30-75	R	UAB	D3/98	—
26	Stewart, Rayna (CB)	5-10/198	6-18-73	3	Northern Arizona	D5/96	16/5
25	Walker, Denard	6-1/192	8-9-73	2	LSU	D3a/97	15/11
36	Wiggins, Lee (CB)	5-11/187	4-27-75	R	South Carolina	D6/98	—
42	Williams, Armon	6-0/215	8-13-73	2	Arizona	D7/97	6/0

Specialists

3	Del Greco, Al (K)	5-10/202	3-2-62	15	Auburn	FA/91	16/0
17	Hentrich, Craig (P)	6-3/200	5-18-71	5	Notre Dame	FA/98	16/0*

Other free agents invited to camp

Louis Adams, LB; Josh Bradley, TE; Maurice Bryant, WR; Lonnie Gilbert, G; Derrick Lewis, CB; Steven Norman, TE; Mike Parker, LB; Perry Phenix, S; Ron Powless, QB; Jason Richards, DT.

*—Not with Oilers in 1997.

OILERS

Tennessee OFFENSE

E. George Thomas (RB)

Wycheck Roan (H-B)

K: Del Greco
P: Hentrich
KR: Thomas
PR: Mason

Thigpen Sanders (WR)

Hopkins Sanderson (LT)

Matthews Norgard (LG)

(QB) McNair Krieg
(C) Stepnoski Norgard (C)

Layman Olson (RG)

Runyan Layman (RT)

Harris Roan (TE)

Dyson Sanders (WR)

Lewis Rolle (CB)

Holmes Roberson (RE)

Ford Halapin (RT)

Walker Salave'a (LT)

Cook Lyons (LE)

Walker Sidney (CB)

Probable starters listed on top

Bowden Jones (RLB)

Robertson Stewart (FS)

Wortham Stallings (MLB)

Bishop Stewart (SS)

Marts Hall (LB)

Tennessee DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Jackie Harris, TE (FA/Bucs); Craig Hentrich, P (FA/Packers); Evan Pilgrim, G (FA/Bears); Yancey Thigpen, WR (FA/Steelers); Ricky Whittle, FB (FA/Saints).

Key losses: Kevin Donnalley, G (FA/Dolphins); Rod Lewis, TE (FA).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Kevin Dyson	WR	Utah
2nd	Samari Rolle	CB	Florida State
3rd	Dainon Sidney	CB	UAB
4th	Joe Salave'a	DT	Arizona
5th	Benji Olson	G	Washington
6th	Lee Wiggins	CB	South Carolina
7th	Jimmy Sprotte	LB	Arizona
7th	Kevin Long	C	Florida State

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	OT Brad Hopkins	Starter with Oilers
1994	DT Henry Ford	Starter with Oilers
1995	QB Steve McNair	Starter with Oilers
1996	RB Eddie George	Starter with Oilers
1997	DE Kenny Holmes	Starter with Oilers

Coaching Staff

Coach: Jeff Fisher. **Offensive staff:** Bart Andrus (offensive assistant/quality control) • George Henshaw (offensive line/tight ends) • Alan Lowry (wide receivers) • Mike Munchak (offensive line) • Sherman Smith (running backs) • Les Steckel (offensive coordinator/quarterbacks). **Defensive staff:** Greg Brown (defensive backs) • O'Neill Gilbert (line-

backers) • Jerry Gray (defensive assistant/quality control) • Rex Norris (defensive line) • Gregg Williams (defensive coordinator). **Others:** Russ Purnell (special teams) • Steve Watterson (strength and rehabilitation).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 8-8 (3rd in AFC Central); 2-6 in division; 4-8 in conference; 6-2 at home; 2-6 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Fisher's regular-season record: 24-30 in four seasons with Oilers.

Fisher's postseason record: none.

Team record past five years: 37-43 (.463, ranks 16th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1993.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*307.4	11	18
Rushing offense	*150.9	2	3
Passing offense	*156.6	15	29
Scoring offense	333	10	14
Total defense	*326.9	9	22
Rushing defense	*98.3	2	4
Passing defense	*228.6	13	27
Scoring defense	310	6	12
Takeaways	31	T4	T8
Giveaways	26	9	15
Turnover differential	5	6	T9
Sacks	35	T10	T24
Sacks allowed	32	T4	T5

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Oilers offensive lineman Bruce Matthews enters the 1998 season with the longest current starting streak in the NFL:

Player, team, position	Consecutive starts
Bruce Matthews, Tennessee, G	165
Dermontti Dawson, Pittsburgh, C	148
Randall McDaniel, Minnesota, G	138
Eric Allen, Oakland, CB	117
Tony Tolbert, Dallas, DT	115
Ken Norton, San Francisco, LB	113
Wayne Martin, New Orleans, DT	112
Tony Mayberry, Tampa Bay, C	112
Richmond Webb, Miami, OT	110

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Cincinnati	1:01
Sept. 13	SAN DIEGO	12:01
Sept. 20	at New England	1:01
Sept. 27	JACKSONVILLE	12:01
Oct. 4	Open date	
Oct. 11	at Baltimore	1:01
Oct. 18	CINCINNATI	12:01
Oct. 25	CHICAGO	3:05
Nov. 1	at Pittsburgh	1:01
Nov. 8	at Tampa Bay	8:20
Nov. 15	PITTSBURGH	12:01
Nov. 22	N.Y. JETS	3:15
Nov. 29	at Seattle	1:05
Dec. 6	BALTIMORE	3:15
Dec. 13	at Jacksonville	1:01
Dec. 20	at Green Bay	12:01
Dec. 26	MINNESOTA (Sat.)	11:35

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T5TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	OAKLAND (OT)	W	24-21
Sept. 7	at Miami (OT)	L	13-16
Sept. 14	Open date		
Sept. 21	BALTIMORE	L	10-36
Sept. 28	at Pittsburgh	L	24-37
Oct. 5	at Seattle	L	13-16
Oct. 12	CINCINNATI	W	30-7
Oct. 19	WASHINGTON	W	28-14
Oct. 26	at Arizona	W	41-14
Nov. 2	JACKSONVILLE	L	24-30
Nov. 9	N.Y. GIANTS	W	10-6
Nov. 16	at Jacksonville	L	9-17
Nov. 23	BUFFALO	W	31-14
Nov. 27	at Dallas	W	27-14
Dec. 4	at Cincinnati	L	14-41
Dec. 14	at Baltimore	L	19-21
Dec. 21	PITTSBURGH	W	16-6

Miscellaneous

Owner: K.S. "Bud" Adams Jr.
Stadium (capacity, surface): Vanderbilt Stadium (41,600, artificial).
Ticket information: 615-341-7600.
Flagship radio station: WGFX-FM, 104.5.
Training site: Tennessee State, Nashville; 615-673-1500.



McNair's effectiveness should be improved thanks to an upgraded receiving corps. His receivers haven't exactly been world-beaters.

fight their way into what likely will be an eight-man rotation.

LINEBACKERS—The status quo likely will prevail, with Barron Wortham in the middle and Lonnie Marts and Joe Bowden on the outside.

Marts, who defected from the Bucs before last season, will get pushed by Lemanski Hall, who has added 10 pounds of muscle. Marts was a playmaker with Tampa Bay but didn't show much of that in his first season with the Oilers. The consensus is he was thinking too much instead of playing instinctively in the Oilers' complicated system, which asks a great deal of its linebackers.

Lenoy Jones, Dennis Stallings and rookie Jimmy Sprotte, drafted out of Arizona, likely will fill special-team roles, with Jones also seeing time in third-down situations. Stallings is Wortham's main backup, so his spot is safe. While Stallings lacks speed, he's a fierce, unwavering special teams player coaches love.

Expect the Oilers to blitz more, which means the likelihood for big plays will increase. But hot and cold performances against the run—such as the Bengals' 276 yards and the Seahawks' 167 last season—can't be repeated.

SECONDARY—This group will determine how much of Fisher's beloved "46" defense gets played. If they can hold up in coverage, the Oilers will return to their blitzing ways. If not, they will play the tricked-up conservative zone they played much of last season.

Other than receiver, this group received most of the offseason attention. Rookie cornerbacks Samari Rolle, a second-round pick from Florida State, and Dainon Sidney, a third-rounder from UAB, will be

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	C
Offensive backfield:	A-	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	B+	Secondary:	C-
Receivers:	C-	Special teams:	C-

expected to compete for spots immediately. Coaches are targeting Steve Jackson's spot in the nickel. Jackson was a starter at the beginning of last season but lost his job to Denard Walker after suffering an ankle injury. Rolle and Sidney have the size the Oilers like. Darryll Lewis is the likely starter at the other corner.

At safety, Bishop has made the past three Pro Bowls, and Marcus Robertson played well enough that he should have made it last year. Rayna Stewart seems destined for a backup spot and special teams duties.

Armon Williams may get moved to linebacker because he has struggled to learn a secondary position. Lee Wiggins, a sixth-round pick from South Carolina, is a likely special teamer, and Anthony Dorsett, who consistently has struggled in coverage, will have a difficult time making the roster.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The front office made Hentrich the first \$1 million-a-year punter in league history, which shows its unhappiness with Reggie Roby's performance last season.

Hentrich is expected to provide more hang time and better directional efforts; it's assumed there will be an improvement in coverage because of those traits. Hentrich has not been good at dropping kicks inside the 20, but the Oilers seem willing to trade accuracy for power. Hentrich also will kick off, which will give the team a legitimate chance at generating touchbacks.

Al Del Greco, who won't be tested in camp, has lost a lot of leg on kickoffs but remains reliable on field goals. Del Greco struggled somewhat outside of the confines of the Astrodome last season, missing eight kicks—all from 45 yards or closer. Vanderbilt Stadium has artificial turf (the Liberty Bowl has a grass field) and is shielded from the wind for the most part, which should help.

The Oilers have not brought back a kickoff for a touchdown since 1988 or a punt since 1994. Mason enters camp as the lead punt returner, but all spots are open. General manager Floyd Reese doesn't like using regulars in the return game, so Sidney and Rolle will get looks if they don't claim starting spots in the secondary.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

Four of the team's first six games are against division foes, and the second half of the season features eight teams that were a combined 88-55 last season. The final eight dates include the Steelers, Jaguars, Packers, Buccaneers, Jets and Seahawks.

Three of the last five games are on the road, including two of the last three, so a slow start isn't likely to turn into a fast finish. But if the Oilers can't handle the teams in their division better than they did last season, when they went 2-6, it won't matter.

BOTTOM LINE

This team is at the point where it needs to decide what it wants to be: an underachiever or playoff contender.

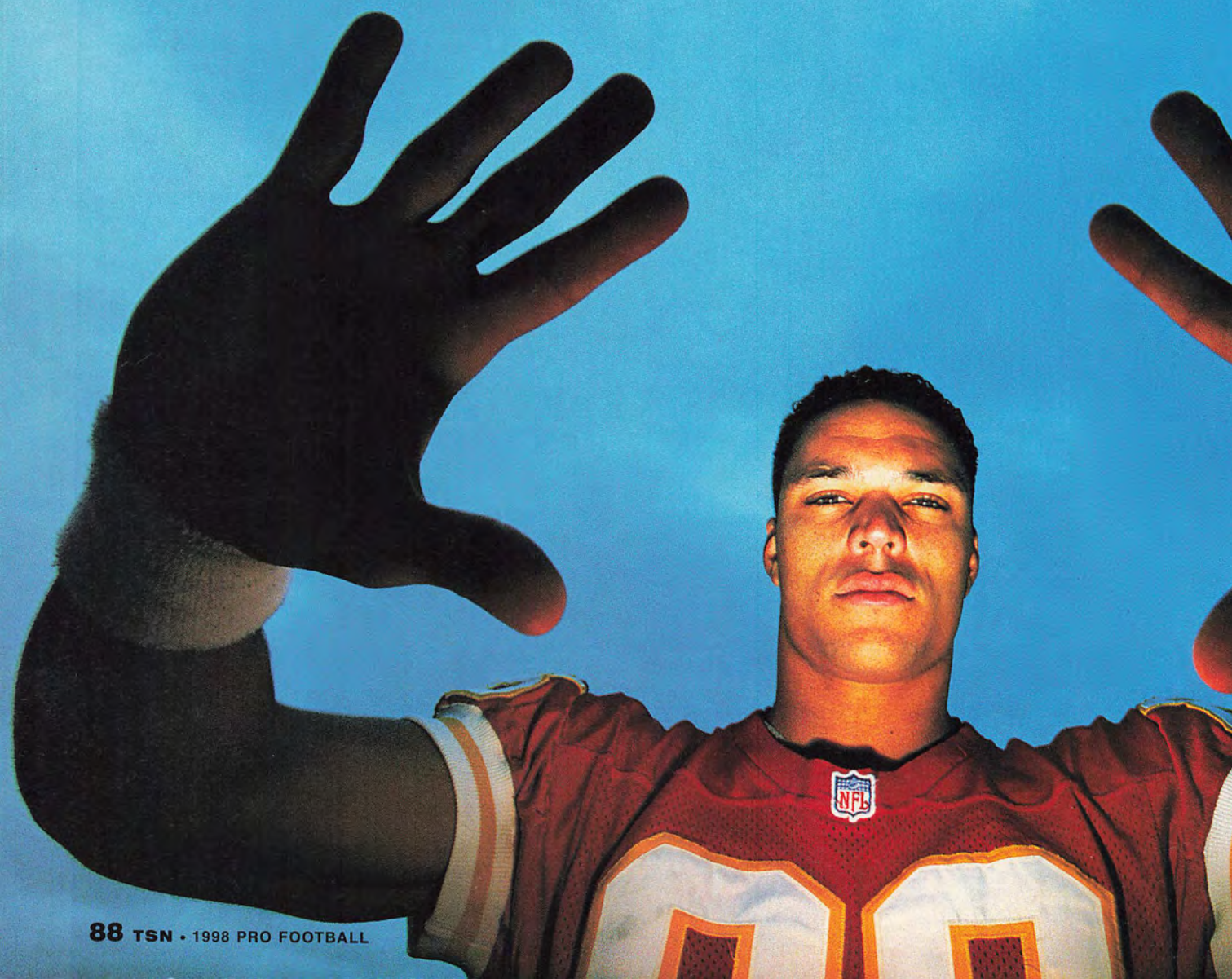
The Oilers have upgraded in free agency and Donnalley was the only significant free-agent defection. In addition, the club seems to have addressed its problems (pass defense and the passing game). Add that to the addition of quality talent in the draft, a legitimate home field and a young nucleus, and the time appears to be now for the Oilers.

TSN

Jeff Legwold covers the Oilers for The Tennessean in Nashville.

Chief prio

Football is No. 1 for Tony Gonzalez, Kansas City's budding star at tight end. But his hoop dreams live on.



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BUILDING ON ROOKIE SUCCESS

Chapter 2



STORY BY LUCIANA CHAVEZ

PHOTO BY ROBERT SEALE / TSN

Let's put it this way: The temptation would be too much for Chiefs tight end Tony Gonzalez to resist. If an NBA general manager were on the other end of the line, Gonzalez's ears would perk up. And why not? Can you blame a 22-year-old for dreaming two sports fantasies for the price of one?

Even with a long-term NFL contract and the potential to be a great tight end, he still thinks about playing in the NBA. The dreams "are going to stick with me always," says Gonzalez, who fancies himself an Anthony Mason or Charles Barkley type. "I wonder if I could have made it (in the NBA). It's still not over. Anything can happen."

Gonzalez's dream may be just that, but it's not far-fetched. He played basketball and football at California, where he showed the ability to outjump rebounders and overpower defenders. He generated enough hype playing both sports to lure Chiefs coach Marty Schottenheimer to a basketball game in the winter of 1997. Gonzalez says he played so poorly he figured Schottenheimer had soured on him as a football player. Later on, "Coach told me something like, 'I guess I don't have to worry about him going to the NBA,'" Gonzalez remembers with a laugh. "I was like, 'Dang, that's cold.'"

Some NBA scouts saw him on better nights. Ed Gregory, director of scouting for the Golden State Warriors, says Gonzalez, usually Cal's sixth man, was very competitive. Still, he thinks Gonzalez made the right career choice. "A lot of people were trying to keep him from playing basketball (when he was in college), but I think it helped Tony significantly," Gregory says. "What I've found is when you have guys with a good feel for games and competition, it helps in other sports because you become a better competitor the more you face pressure situations."

Gonzalez also found that many basketball fundamentals helped him in football. "Basketball requires coordination—left hand, right hand, jumping, jump stops, L cuts, screening guys out, pushing off, playing in traffic," he says. "I was doing the same things in football."

Playing both sports probably limited his potential less in football than basketball, where he was unable to develop his skills and physique to an NBA level. And then there's the matter of his size (6-4, 244 pounds). That, combined with his 34-inch vertical leap, is great for an NFL tight end. But to compete in the NBA?

"Look at guys that are about (Tony's) size," says Keith Drum, a regional scout for the Sacramento Kings. "Michael Jordan and Clyde Drexler are 6-6. Those are the types of guys and skills he'd be competing against. Now, could he have made it in the NBA had he developed those skills, I couldn't say. ... It's hard to succeed in two sports. You have to go through a period where your whole muscle structure changes. That's what Tony would be facing."

Meanwhile, his path to the NFL involved fewer question marks. "The only thing I ever told him was to play both as long as he wanted but that I thought he had a chance to be an extra-special player at tight end," says Keith Gilbertson, who coached Gonzalez for two seasons at Cal and now is the Seahawks' tight ends coach. "I'm not blowing smoke. He has the physical tools and he's so tough. The way he would block and go through people as a freshman in college, you could almost see him as a defensive end. He's good."

That's why the Chiefs traded up to make Gonzalez, who left college after his junior season, the 13th pick in the first round of the 1997 draft. Though he was brought along slowly early last season, Gonzalez came on strong in the second half. Against San Francisco—and former Cal coach Steve Mariucci—he caught a touchdown pass and blocked a punt to set up another touchdown in a blowout. His 33 receptions, including 25 in the final nine weeks, are a record for a Chiefs rookie tight end.

This season should be even better for Gonzalez. The Chiefs plan to open up the passing game and put Gonzalez in more situations where he can use his size, strength and jumping ability to create mismatches. That sounds good to Gonzalez, who reached the end zone twice last season and wants to be a more frequent visitor this fall. His goal is to be mentioned along with guys such as Shannon Sharpe, Ben Coates, Wesley Walls and Mark Chmura—Pro Bowlers all. That's much less of a stretch than any NBA dreams he still harbors.

"Don't get it mixed up. I love football, too," Gonzalez says. "The games are a pure rush. ... By the time I'm done playing, I want to be among the best tight ends to ever play the game."

TSN

Staff writer Luciana Chavez covers the Chiefs and the Royals for THE SPORTING NEWS.



Defending Super Bowl champions likely to face problems in their division

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 2nd

BY JIM ARMSTRONG

The AFC on a roll in the Super Bowl? Mike Shanahan thinks it could happen. Now that the junior-varsity conference finally has won the big game, Shanahan believes an AFC team could win it again this season. He just isn't sure if the Broncos are the team that will do it.

Denver's victory in Super Bowl XXXII didn't come without a price. No, the Broncos didn't sit by helplessly and endure a raid on their roster, *a la* the Cowboys and Packers. Then again, since they virtually were maxed out on the salary cap, they didn't get any better, either.

Denver lost two starters, guard Brian Habib and linebacker Allen Aldridge, to free agency. The rest of the team returns intact. John Elway, Terrell Davis, John Mobley, the offensive line that dominated the Packers in the playoffs ... everybody.

But will it be enough in the AFC West, one of the league's most improved divisions? Fact is, the Broncos finished second in the division in 1997, and they will be pressed to finish that high again.

"It's always difficult to repeat, especially in this division," Shanahan said. "You look at what's happened during the offseason, it gives you an idea of why a lot of people think it's the best division in football."

Shanahan is amazed every time he takes an accounting of the rest of the West. A roll call of newcomers to the division features—among others—Leslie O'Neal, Charles Woodson, Derrick Alexander, Aaron Taylor, John Jackson, Ryan Leaf, Darrin Smith and Ricky Watters. The last time Shanahan checked, none of them had signed with the Broncos.

"Every owner in our division is committed to winning," Shanahan said. "They're all willing to spend to get a winner."

COACHING

Shanahan proved last season that he belongs among the elite coaches in the league. No coach has come so far so fast in the past three years. He inherited a team that finished 7-9 in 1994 and turned it into a Super Bowl champion by 1997.

Now comes the interesting part. This will be the first season in which Shanahan wasn't able to add a handful of impact free agents to the roster. With the team having basically stood pat during the offseason, it will be up to him to motivate a group that, aside from four or five key positions, isn't as talented as Kansas City.

The Broncos won't have their Revenge Tour motto working for them this season, as they did during last year's playoffs, when they beat Jacksonville, Kansas City and Pittsburgh to get to the Super Bowl. But Shanahan doesn't believe motivation will be a problem. Not with a group of veterans he largely hand-picked through free agency.

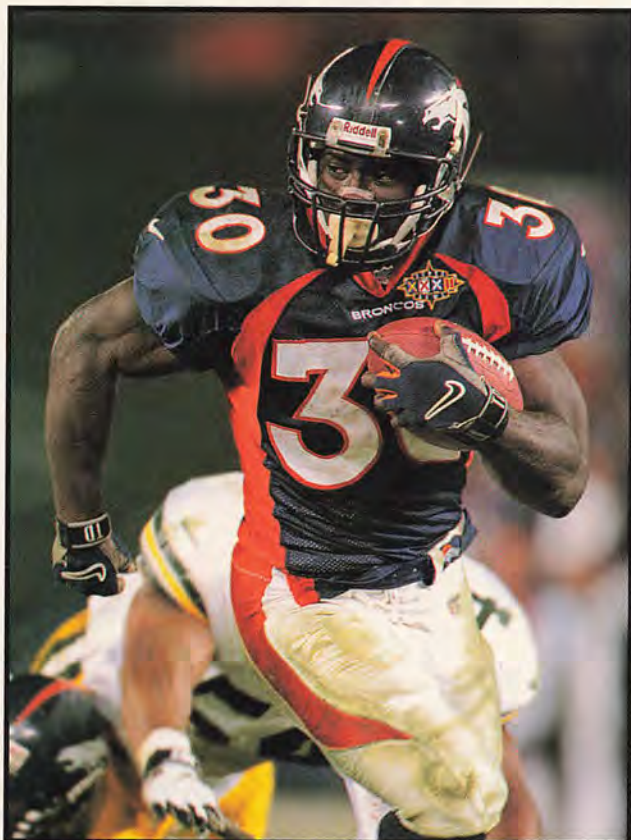
Shanahan also could have to contend with more injuries this season. The Broncos have stayed relatively injury-free during the past two years, when they've won 29 games (including postseason play). After Tory James' season-ending knee injury in the preseason last year, the team had only two starters, Neil Smith and Mark Schlereth, miss more than one game with injuries.

Shanahan is one of the great offensive minds in the game, but he's fortunate to have arguably the best offensive line coach in the business on his side. Alex Gibbs, Shanahan's closest friend in the coaching fraternity, has done an amazing job of molding the Broncos' linemen into the best run-blocking unit in the league.

Both coordinators, Gary Kubiak and Greg Robinson, could be headed for head-coaching jobs in the near future. Kubiak has been in Shanahan's offense for four years, and Robinson proved his ability in the Super Bowl by thoroughly confusing the Packers with his blitz packages.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—John Elway isn't getting better with age, but his statistics are. Elway definitely is benefiting from Shanahan's offense.



Davis is coming off a record-smashing season. And he's only 25. Expect him to keep putting up big numbers in this offense.

Fact: He has thrown 79 touchdown passes in three seasons under Shanahan. In 1986, '87 and '89, when the Broncos went to Super Bowls under Dan Reeves, he threw 56.

At 38, Elway still can make plays that most quarterbacks wouldn't attempt. And, thanks to the presence of Terrell Davis, there isn't as much pressure on him as there was in his earlier days.

The Broncos have turned into a ball-control team with Davis in the backfield, but Elway still can beat you deep. Witness this number: The Broncos scored from beyond their opponents' 20-yard line 23 times last season, seven more than the opposition.

Bubby Brister, who returned to the league last year after sitting out the 1996 season, is solidly entrenched as Elway's main backup. Jeff Lewis, once the heir apparent, could sit out the season after undergoing a knee reconstruction. That would make room for third-round pick Brian Griese.

RUNNING BACKS—If Barry Sanders is the NFL's best running back, Davis is the league's ultimate workhorse. From opening day through the Super Bowl, Davis carried the ball 481 times for 2,331 yards—both league records—and 23 touchdowns.

At 25, Davis is just approaching his prime. And don't think for a moment that he'll fall victim to the trappings of fame after winning the MVP award in the Super Bowl. He's a tireless worker who has put on 15 pounds of muscle since coming into the league. Not only that, he's in perfect sync with his line.

Shanahan is determined to keep Davis around for a while. He drafted two running backs, Alabama's Curtis Alexander and Michigan's

Chris Howard, in the middle rounds in hopes that one can ease Davis' workload, if only for a few carries. If not, Vaughn Hebronn will be Davis' main backup.

For all his greatness, Davis didn't get all those yards on his own. Fullback Howard Griffith is one of the most underrated players on the team. He carried the ball nine times last season, nine more times than he complained about it. As often as not, Davis' big runs are launched when Griffith leads him into the hole and takes a linebacker out of the play.

RECEIVERS—For a team that won the Super Bowl and led the league in points, the Broncos don't have big-name receivers. Rod Smith was a practice-squad player in 1994, and Ed McCaffrey was a bargain-basement free-agent signee a year later.

Smith has emerged as one of the best big-play receivers in the game, and McCaffrey caught eight touchdown passes last season. How? For one thing, they're in Shanahan's offense. For another, tight end Shannon Sharpe often demands coverage from a cornerback, which creates mismatches that favor Smith and McCaffrey.

If there's a rookie who will make an immediate impact, it's No. 1 pick Marcus Nash. The Broncos were disappointed with Willie Green, who caught only 19 passes in 1997, and Nash has a good chance to be the No. 3 receiver.

This team needs Nash's big-play potential in a division that includes Shawn Springs, Dale Carter and Woodson. If the Broncos don't keep the pressure on opposing secondaries, they could find eight or nine players crowding the line of scrimmage to stop Davis before he can get started.

Sharpe, who just turned 30, never ceases to amaze. He already has earned six Pro Bowl berths, more than Hall of Fame tight ends Mike Ditka and John Mackey. He's one of the few tight ends who single-handedly can stretch a defense. His mere presence makes the Broncos' other receivers more dangerous.

Sharpe's backup, Dwayne Carswell, is a punishing run blocker in two-tight end sets, and he has improved his receiving ability to the point where Elway occasionally looks for him near the goal line.

LINE—Ask Reggie White how good the Broncos' line is. He didn't get close enough to read Elway's number in the Super Bowl. Neither did Gilbert Brown, who was blown off the ball throughout the second half.

The Broncos' tackles, Gary Zimmerman and Tony Jones, are arguably the best pair of bookends in the game. Right guard Habib was lost to free agency, but Shanahan was able to retain his left guard, Schlereth, the spiritual leader of the team who happens to be one of the best run blockers in the business.

There's no high draft pick in the prime of his career on this line. Schlereth has had 20 surgeries, Zimmerman had to be lured out of retirement two games into the 1997 season and center Tom Nalen was on the waiver wire in 1994.

So how did this group dominate the Packers? Gibbs certainly is a big factor. He's a fiery leader and one of the great teachers in the game. The other factor is Davis. As his production has continued to rise, so has the line's confidence. By season's end, the Broncos' linemen thought they could dominate any defensive line in the league, and they proved it on Super Bowl Sunday.

DEFENSE

LINE—For all the attention Davis received during the team's amazing Super Bowl run, the Broncos couldn't have done it without an inspired effort by their defensive line. The unit was greatly improved

Denver Broncos

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
6	Briser, Bubby	6-3/205	8-15-62	12	Northeast Louisiana	FA/97	1/0
7	Elway, John	6-3/215	6-28-60	16	Stanford	T-Bal/83	16/16
14	Griese, Brian	6-3/215	3-18-75	R	Michigan	D3/98	—
8	Lewis, Jeff	6-2/211	4-17-73	3	Northern Arizona	D4a/96	3/0

Running Backs

40	Alexander, Curtis	6-0/204	6-11-74	R	Alabama	D4/98	—
30	Davis, Terrell	5-11/210	10-28-72	4	Georgia	D6b/95	15/15
29	Griffith, Howard (FB)	6-0/232	11-17-67	6	Illinois	UFA-Car/97	15/13
22	Hebronn, Vaughn	5-8/198	10-7-70	6	Virginia Tech	FA/96	16/1
35	Howard, Chris	5-10/223	5-5-75	R	Michigan	D5/97	—
45	Loville, Derek	5-10/205	7-4-68	8	Oregon	FA/97	16/0
42	Smith, Detron (FB)	5-9/230	2-25-74	3	Texas A&M	D3a/96	16/0

Receivers

83	Armour, Justin	6-4/209	1-1-73	3	Stanford	FA/98	1/0*
89	Carswell, Dwayne (TE)	6-3/260	1-18-72	5	Liberty	CFA/94	16/3
86	Chamberlain, Byron (TE)	6-1/242	10-17-71	4	Wayne (Neb.) State	D7b/95	10/0
82	Gamble, David	6-1/190	6-14-71	1	New Hampshire	FA/97	2/0
85	Green, Willie	6-4/191	4-2-66	9	Mississippi	UFA-Car/97	16/1
81	Jeffers, Patrick	6-3/218	2-2-73	3	Virginia	D5/96	10/0
37	Lynn, Anthony (TE)	6-3/230	12-21-68	5	Texas Tech	FA/97	16/0
87	McCaffrey, Ed	6-5/215	8-17-68	8	Stanford	FA/95	15/15
12	Nash, Marcus	6-3/195	2-1-76	R	Tennessee	D1/98	—
84	Sharpe, Shannon (TE)	6-2/228	6-26-68	9	Savannah (Ga.) State	D7/90	16/16
80	Smith, Rod	6-0/196	5-15-70	4	Missouri Southern	FA/95	16/16
88	Wilson, Sir Mawn	6-2/213	6-4-73	1	Syracuse	FA/97	1/0

Offensive Linemen

60	Banks, Chris (G)	6-1/286	4-4-73	1	Kansas	FA/97	0/0
63	Diaz-Infante, David (G)	6-3/296	3-31-64	4	San Jose State	FA/96	16/7
67	Goeas, Leo (G)	6-4/300	8-15-66	9	Hawaii	FA/98	11/7*
61	Hall, Courtney (C)	6-1/281	8-26-68	9	Rice	FA/98	0/0*
60	Jones, K.C. (C)	6-1/275	3-28-74	2	Miami (Fla.)	FA/97	0/0
77	Jones, Tony (T)	6-5/291	5-24-66	11	Western Carolina	T-Bal/97	16/16
66	Nalen, Tom (C)	6-2/286	5-13-71	5	Boston College	D7c/94	16/16
62	Neil, Dan (G)	6-2/281	10-21-73	2	Texas	D3/97	3/0
60	Novitsky, Craig (C)	6-5/295	5-12-71	4	UCLA	FA/98	0/0*
69	Schlereth, Mark (G)	6-3/287	1-25-66	10	Idaho	FA/95	11/11
74	Swayne, Harry (T)	6-5/293	2-2-65	12	Rutgers	FA/97	7/0
70	Teague, Trey (T)	6-5/307	12-27-74	R	Tennessee	D7a/98	—
65	Zimmerman, Gary (T)	6-6/294	12-13-61	13	Oregon	T-Min/93	14/14

Defensive Linemen

68	Ashman, Duane (E)	6-4/274	12-29-73	1	Virginia	D5b/97	0/0
96	Hasselbach, Harald (E)	6-6/284	9-22-67	5	Washington	FA/94	16/3
72	Jones, Ernest (E)	6-2/255	4-1-71	4	Oregon	FA/96	1/0
97	Lodish, Mike (T)	6-3/280	8-11-67	9	UCLA	FA/96	16/0
93	Pryce, Trevor (T)	6-5/284	8-3-75	2	Clemson	D1/97	8/3
99	Richie, David (T)	6-4/280	9-26-73	2	Washington	FA/97	2/0
90	Smith, Neil (E)	6-4/269	4-10-66	11	Nebraska	FA/97	14/13
98	Tanuvasa, Maa (T)	6-2/267	11-6-70	4	Hawaii	FA/95	15/5
94	Traylor, Keith (T)	6-2/304	9-3-69	7	Central Oklahoma	FA/97	16/16
95	Washington, Marvin (E)	6-6/285	10-22-65	10	Idaho	FA/98	10/1*
91	Williams, Alfred (E)	6-6/263	11-6-68	8	Colorado	FA/96	16/16

Linebackers

56	Burns, Keith	6-2/236	5-16-72	5	Oklahoma State	D7a/94	16/0
59	Cadrez, Glenn	6-3/249	1-2-70	7	Houston	FA/95	16/0
51	Mobley, John	6-1/236	10-10-73	3	Kutztown (Pa.)	D1/96	16/16
53	Romanowski, Bill	6-4/245	4-2-66	11	Boston College	FA/96	16/16
58	Russ, Steve	6-4/245	9-16-72	2	Air Force	D7a/95	14/0
	Wayne, Nate	6-0/229	1-12-75	R	Mississippi	D7b/98	—

Defensive Backs

27	Atwater, Steve (S)	6-3/216	10-28-66	10	Arkansas	D1/89	15/15
28	Barnes, Tomur (CB)	5-10/188	9-8-70	5	North Texas	FA/98	3/0*
34	Braxton, Tyrone (CB)	5-11/185	12-17-64	12	North Dakota State	FA/95	16/16
26	Brown, Eric (S)	6-0/203	3-20-75	R	Mississippi State	D2/98	—
48	Coghill, George (S)	6-0/211	3-30-70	2	Wake Forest	FA/97	0/0
39	Crockett, Ray (CB)	5-10/184	1-5-67	10	Baylor	FA/94	16/16
33	Dodge, Dedrick (S)	6-2/187	6-14-67	7	Florida State	FA/97	16/1
23	Gordon, Darrien (CB)	5-11/178	11-14-70	6	Stanford	UFA-SD/97	16/16
21	Hilliard, Randy (CB)	5-11/168	2-6-67	9	Northwestern State (La.)	FA/94	14/0
20	James, Tory (CB)	6-1/193	5-18-73	3	LSU	D2/96	0/0
25	Johnson, Darrius (CB)	5-9/185	9-17-72	3	Oklahoma	D4b/96	16/0
27	Paul, Tito (CB)	6-0/200	5-24-72	3	Ohio State	FA/98	15/5*
32	Veland, Tony (S)	6-1/209	3-11-73	2	Nebraska	D6/96	12/0

Specialists

1	Elam, Jason (K)	5-11/200	3-8-70	6	Hawaii	D3b/93	15/0
16	Rouen, Tom (P)	6-3/225	6-9-68	6	Colorado	FA/93	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Chris Banks, G; Darrick Branch, WR; Cyron Brown, DE; Jeremy Burkett, TE; Hillary Butler, LB; Ryan Christopherson, RB; Andre Cooper, WR; Chris Gizzi, LB; Erick Hinder, LB; Ed Hervey, WR; Jon Hesse, LB; Pat Ivey, DE; Damian Jefferies, DE; Kevin Jordan, WR; Jason Kaiser, CB; Carl Kidd, CB; Josh LaRocca, QB; Matt Lepsis, OT; Ryan McCoy, LB; Tori Noel, S; Doug Nussmeier, QB; Mike Panasuk, K/P; Terry Ray, CB; Melvin Tuten, OT; Kendall Watkins, G.

*—Not with Broncos in 1997.

BRONCOS

Denver OFFENSE

Davis
Alexander



Zimmerman
Swayne



Schlereth
Goeas



(QB) Elway
Brister
(C) Nalen
Diaz-Infante



Diaz-Infante
Neil



Griffith
D. Smith



Jones
Teague



Sharpe
Carswell



McGaffrey
Nash



James
Gordon



Williams
Washington



Pryce
Tanuvasa



Traylor
Lodish



N. Smith
Hasselbach



Crockett
Johnson

Mobley
Russ



Romanowski
Wayne

Probable starters
listed on top

Atwater
Veland



Braxton
Brown

Denver DEFENSE

K: Elam
P: Rouen
KR: Hebron, Johnson
PR: Gordon, R. Smith

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Justin Armour, WR (FA/49ers); Leo Goeas, G (FA/Ravens); Tito Paul, CB (FA/Bengals); Marvin Washington, DE (FA/49ers).

Key losses: Allen Aldridge, LB (FA/Lions); Jamie Brown, OT (trade/49ers); Brian Habib, G (FA/Seahawks).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Marcus Nash	WR	Tennessee
2nd	Eric Brown	S	Mississippi State
3rd	Brian Griese	QB	Michigan
4th	Curtis Alexander	RB	Alabama
5th	Chris Howard	RB	Michigan
7th	Trey Teague	T	Tennessee
7th	Nate Wayne	LB	Mississippi

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	DE Dan Williams	Starter with Chiefs
1994	None	
1995	None	
1996	LB John Mobley	Starter with Broncos
1997	DT Trevor Pryce	Starter with Broncos

Coaching Staff

Coach: Mike Shanahan. **Offensive staff:** Alex Gibbs (assistant head coach/offensive line) • Mike Heimerdinger (wide receivers) • Gary Kubiak (offensive coordinator/quarterbacks) • Brian Pariani (tight ends) • Ricky Porter (offense assistant) • Bobby Turner (running backs). **Defensive staff:** Frank Bush (linebackers) • Barney Chavous (defensive assistant) • Ed Donatelli (defensive backs) • George Dyer (defensive line) • Greg Robinson (defensive coordinator) • Rick Smith (defensive assistant). **Others:** Rick Dennison (special teams) • Greg Saporta (assistant strength and conditioning) • John Teerlinck (pass rush specialist) • Rich Tuten (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 12-4 (2nd in AFC West); 6-2 in division; 9-3 in conference; 8-0 at home; 4-4 on road.

1997 playoff record: Defeated Jaguars, 42-17, in AFC wild-card game; defeated Chiefs, 14-10, in AFC divisional game; defeated Steelers, 24-21, in AFC championship game; defeated Packers, 31-24, in Super Bowl.

Shanahan's regular-season record: 33-15 in three seasons with Broncos; 41-27 overall in five seasons with Broncos and Raiders.

Shanahan's postseason record: 4-1 in two appearances with Broncos.

Team record past five years: 49-31 (.613, ranks 6th in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1995

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*367	1	1
Rushing offense	*148.6	3	4
Passing offense	*218.4	7	9
Scoring offense	472	1	1
Total defense	*291.9	1	5
Rushing defense	*112.7	10	16
Passing defense	*179.3	2	5
Scoring defense	287	T2	T6
Takeaways	31	T4	T8
Giveaways	21	4	6
Turnover differential	10	T2	T4
Sacks	44	6	T10
Sacks allowed	35	6	11

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

The 1997 Broncos became only the third team in NFL history to go 4-0 in the same postseason.

1980—Oakland

Defeated Houston*, 27-7

Defeated Cleveland, 14-12

Defeated San Diego, 34-27

Defeated Philadelphia, 27-10

1982—Washington

Defeated Detroit, 31-7

Defeated Minnesota, 21-7

Defeated Dallas, 31-17

Defeated Miami, 27-17

1997—Denver

Defeated Jacksonville*, 42-17

Defeated Kansas City, 14-10

Defeated Pittsburgh, 24-21

Defeated Green Bay, 31-24

*Home game.

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 7	NEW ENGLAND	6:20
Sept. 13	DALLAS	2:15
Sept. 20	at Oakland	1:15
Sept. 27	at Washington	1:01
Oct. 4	PHILADELPHIA	2:15
Oct. 11	at Seattle	1:15
Oct. 18	Open date	
Oct. 25	JACKSONVILLE	2:15
Nov. 1	at Cincinnati	1:01
Nov. 8	SAN DIEGO	2:15
Nov. 16	at Kansas City (Mon.)	7:20
Nov. 22	OAKLAND	2:15
Nov. 29	at San Diego	5:20
Dec. 6	KANSAS CITY	2:15
Dec. 13	at N.Y. Giants	1:01
Dec. 21	at Miami (Mon.)	8:20
Dec. 27	SEATTLE	2:15

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T15TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	KANSAS CITY	W	19-3
Sept. 7	at Seattle	W	35-14
Sept. 14	ST. LOUIS	W	35-14
Sept. 21	CINCINNATI	W	38-20
Sept. 28	at Atlanta	W	29-21
Oct. 6	NEW ENGLAND	W	34-13
Oct. 12	Open date		
Oct. 19	at Oakland	L	25-28
Oct. 26	at Buffalo (OT)	W	23-20
Nov. 2	SEATTLE	W	30-27
Nov. 9	CAROLINA	W	34-0
Nov. 16	at Kansas City	L	22-24
Nov. 24	OAKLAND	W	31-3
Nov. 30	at San Diego	W	38-28
Dec. 7	at Pittsburgh	L	24-35
Dec. 15	at San Francisco	L	17-34
Dec. 21	SAN DIEGO	W	38-3
Dec. 27	JACKSONVILLE*	W	42-17
Jan. 4	at Kansas City†	W	14-10
Jan. 11	at Pittsburgh‡	W	24-21
Jan. 25	Green Bay§	W	31-24

*AFC wild-card game. †AFC divisional game.

‡AFC championship game. §Super Bowl 32.

Miscellaneous

President: Pat Bowlen.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Mile High Stadium (76,078, grass).

Ticket information: 303-433-7466.

Flagship radio station: KOA-AM, 850.

Training site: University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colo.; 303-623-5212.



Despite a small-college background, Mobley has made a big impression. Watch for the Broncos to use him on more blitzes this season.

ROBERT SEALE / TSN

during the playoffs, and things should be even better this year.

Starting ends Alfred Williams and Neil Smith played hurt for most of last season. Both had offseason surgery to repair torn triceps and are expected to provide a more consistent pass rush this season.

Left tackle Keith Traylor might have been the best free-agent signing in the league last year. He provided a massive presence in the middle, a stark contrast to the Broncos' undersized linemen of years past. Traylor is one of the quickest 300-pounders in the league, and at 29 he should be in his prime.

The most exciting young lineman on the roster is Trevor Pryce, last year's No. 1 draftee who's still making the transition from college linebacker to NFL defensive tackle. Pryce, who's up to 290 pounds, projects as the starter on the right side. If so, Maa Tanuvasa would be free to rush the quarterback in passing situations, a role he converted into five sacks in 1996.

LINEBACKERS—Aldridge's loss will hurt, but the Broncos have one of the emerging stars in the league among this corps. Two years out of Division II Kutztown (Pa.) University, John Mobley is ready to take his place among the game's great linebackers. Mobley had 162 tackles, four sacks and three forced fumbles last season. If anything, he figures to get to the quarterback even more this season, considering Denver's postseason blitzing success.

Bill Romanowski, who hasn't missed a game in his 10-year career, is set on the strongside, with another veteran, Glenn Cadrez, in the middle. Cadrez has started seven games in his six-year career, none at middle linebacker. At 245 pounds, he has the size to handle the position, but he'll have to step up if the defense is going to stuff the run like it did during the playoffs.

There's little depth at this position. Any injury here and the Broncos could be in trouble.

SECONDARY—The cornerbacks were solid last season and could be even better this year. Ray Crockett is one of the most underrated corners in the league, and Darrien Gordon had a good season after signing as a free agent. Robinson's defensive scheme calls for them to be in man coverage about 70 percent of the time, and each thrived in

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	A	Defensive line:	B
Offensive backfield:	A	Linebackers:	C
Offensive line:	A	Secondary:	B
Receivers:	B	Special teams:	B

the role in 1997.

Trouble is, both are about 5-10, which creates mismatch problems against taller receivers. That's why the return of James is so critical. A No. 2 draft pick in '96, James was scheduled to start at right corner last year but suffered a season-ending knee injury in the preseason. At 6-1 and 190 pounds, he's the biggest corner on the roster.

The Broncos are hoping to coax one more productive season out of aging safeties Steve Atwater and Tyrone Braxton. The two have been marvelous during their eight seasons of starting side by side. If either Atwater or Braxton goes down, the Broncos would turn to Tony Veland to step in. Another possibility is second-rounder Eric Brown, a fierce run stuffer.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Gordon is one of the best punt returners in NFL history, but he struggled down the stretch last season. That's another reason the return of James is so important. If he starts at right corner, Gordon's legs will be fresher to return punts.

Gordon has an incredible knack for making big plays. He returned three punts for touchdowns in 1997—from 94, 82 and 75 yards. Now if Hebron can just find similar success on the kickoff-return team. Unfortunately, the Broncos are the answer to a rather dubious trivia question: What team has gone the longest without returning a kickoff for a touchdown? It has been 26 years for the Broncos.

Jason Elam went to the Pro Bowl in 1995, but he hasn't been the same kicker since. On the plus side, Elam is only 28 and has one of the strongest legs in the game.

Punter Tom Rouen is better than he showed last season. He had his highest gross average since 1993 but was too inconsistent.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The Broncos might have won the AFC West last year if it weren't for a three-game road trip to San Diego, Pittsburgh and San Francisco late in the season. They lost two of the three, falling a game behind Kansas City.

There will be no three-game road stretch this year, but it's not like the schedule doesn't include some rough spots. The Broncos will play six games from November 16 through December 21—four on the road and three of those at night. That can't help but affect their preparation for the next week.

The good news is that the schedule is set up for the team to get off to a fast start. The Broncos open the season with home games against New England, which historically doesn't play well at Mile High Stadium, and Dallas.

It's the third game that could prove pivotal. If the Broncos win at Oakland, they could well be 3-0 heading to Washington for what figures to be a tough game against the Redskins.

The Broncos will need to jump out of the gate quickly, then play well in the middle part of their schedule. They could be in trouble if they have to beat the Giants on December 13 to stay in the playoff hunt. That game will be played on the road, on carpet and in front of a hostile crowd that will save its most intense booing for what figures to be Elway's final trip to New York.

BOTTOM LINE

The Broncos are basically the same team that won the Super Bowl last season. Question is, can they avoid injuries and the complacency that has plagued so many Super Bowl champions of the past? This much is certain: If you're going to beat the Broncos, you're going to have to stop Terrell Davis, the AFC's answer to Barry Sanders. **TSN**

Jim Armstrong covers the Broncos for the Denver Post.



Risk-reward factor will be big for Chiefs as they search for playoff success

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 1st

BY LUCIANA CHAVEZ

The Chiefs proved that change was a good thing in 1997. In 1998, they'll try to show that even a sin like gambling can be good for the soul. The Chiefs are taking big risks while looking for a quick, highly profitable result: a trip to the Super Bowl.

Winning the AFC West with a revamped, younger squad in '97 obviously upped the ante for '98. But a 13-3 regular-season record and home-field advantage in the playoffs resulted only in a second-round playoff loss for the second time in three years. The weight of expectations nipping at the team's heels means patience has been worn thin.

Why is it a gamble? The Chiefs solved about half of their offensive problems with a single move, but who will pick up the scoring slack for departed running back Marcus Allen? And the Chiefs made the NFL's best scoring defense even better with two more acquisitions, but they will be attempting to plug in the biggest one out of position.

Offensively, they lifted wide receiver Derrick Alexander out of Baltimore and are plugging him in opposite Andre Rison, a Pro Bowl selection last year. It basically double-dog dares defenses to put more than one defender on either receiver. The Chiefs also are banking that former fullback Donnell Bennett can convert to halfback. He will try to replace Allen, who scored 11 of the offense's 35 touchdowns in 1997.

Defensively, Kansas City should be tougher—if that's possible. The Chiefs return nine starters from a stingy unit that allowed 232 points in '97. They also signed linemen Chester McGlockton and Leslie O'Neal. McGlockton, who played tackle for the Raiders, will be tried at left end. O'Neal, late of St. Louis, is a proven pass rusher who is expected to step in at right end.

COACHING

The Chiefs have finished no lower than second in the division during Marty Schottenheimer's nine-season tenure, with playoff appearances in seven of the past eight seasons. Schottenheimer has won a lot of games, but a 14-10 playoff loss to Denver that sent the '97 season down in flames was crushingly familiar. His frustration level reached an all-time high after that loss, but Schottenheimer is nothing if not resilient. A collection of players like he has in Kansas City has made it easier for him to get on with the business of winning in 1998.

The only big change on the staff was the departure of offensive coordinator Paul Hackett, who took the coaching job at Southern California. Jimmy Raye, formerly the running backs coach, moves into the coordinator's job. He wants to put the emphasis back on the running game, but Hackett's influence remains. Raye will not stray too far from quarterback Elvis Grbac's roots in a West Coast-style passing game. Former NFL running back Lionel James, most recently an assistant at Auburn, steps in to coach the running backs.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Grbac has to be a leader, and he knows it. This is his team. He was building toward making that happen in '97 until a broken collarbone in early November put the brakes on his progress. After the offense broke down during the final drive in the playoff game against Denver, changes were necessary.

The biggest one will be allowing Grbac to call more audibles. He didn't have many opportunities to do so before the playoff game, but the Chiefs are specifically preparing for it in '98. While the passing game stalled occasionally, Grbac no longer will have to rely on a single go-to receiver; he'll have both Rison and Alexander as targets. The



Davis doesn't get much notice, but he is one of the Chiefs' key defenders. He is an integral part of an excellent group of linebackers.

other change on offense will be longer pass plays. Raye wants to air it out more and stretch defenses vertically. He has the young quarterback with a strong arm, so he'll try to exploit that.

Rich Gannon returns as the backup. Confidence in Gannon as the No. 2 man is sky high after he compiled a 5-1 record as Grbac's stand-in last season. Pat Barnes, in his second year, could be used as the third quarterback, but he needs to throw the ball better. Using Billy Joe Tolleriver, a late acquisition in '97, isn't out of the question.

RUNNING BACKS—The Chiefs need someone to make up for the 11 rushing touchdowns they lost when Allen retired. Allen came to Kansas City in 1993, toward the twilight of his career, as a short-yardage, goal-line running back, and he was one of the best ever in that role. Because he was one of the best, other running backs were rarely exposed to those situations. The Chiefs have several good running backs, but can they score?

They are taking a risk by moving Bennett to halfback and expecting him to be the guy to fill part of the scoring void. Bennett ran well as a

single fullback straight up the heart of defenses in '97, but was not asked to grind out the tough yards near the goal line. Bennett lost about 15 pounds (he weighed between 245 and 250 last year) and will look shifter and quicker running between the tackles. Greg Robinson and James Bostic are veterans who could back up Bennett. But an intriguing alternative would be Jesse Haynes, a fast, compact back who was signed as a rookie free agent in '97 and spent the season on the practice squad.

Three-time Pro Bowl fullback Kimble Anders also will have to pick it up in the scoring department. He is most valuable as a receiver, but he can also block and run. Tony Richardson, who worked mainly as a blocking back for Allen, isn't one-dimensional and is an untapped source. Richardson's playing time should increase with Bennett moving to running back.

RECEIVERS—Rison is a savvy guy with quick moves. Alexander gives the team a bigger, stronger guy on the other side. Having both means the passing game could explode. Rison constantly was dogged by double teams last season, but defenses can't focus exclusively on him anymore. Each player should benefit from having the other guy around.

Tight end Tony Gonzalez, a rookie last season, started to show that, yes, he is everything the Chiefs want him to be. Gonzalez got the call twice in the playoff game against Denver near the goal line; he caught a 12-yard pass for Kansas City's only touchdown. That should be a preview of things to come. His size and strength create matchup problems, and he gives the Chiefs good balance catching balls over the middle. Again, that will help open up the deep passing game.

Gonzalez will be the starter—if not to begin the season, then eventually. Ted Popson, the incumbent starter, still will be used extensively. The Chiefs use two tight ends in a lot of running situations and Popson is the more accomplished blocker.

Danan Hughes isn't flashy, but he is a consistent receiver who will be the No. 3 guy. Speedsters Kevin Lockett and Joe Horn will compete for the fourth receiver slot. Tamarick Vanover has a job as a kick returner regardless of where he's listed on the depth chart.

LINE—The interior of guards Will Shields and Dave Szott and center Tim Grunhard has played together so long, it is more like a three-headed monster than individuals on the field. Don't wonder how the Chiefs have been able to run the ball with a committee of running backs instead of a big-name feature back. Those three are the reason. As long as they're together, that doesn't change. Depth is poor, though.

The Chiefs aren't as strong at tackle. Bringing in Glenn Parker to start the '97 season proved to be a solid move at right tackle. He and left tackle Jeff Criswell form a workable, if aging, duo. It should help that Criswell will begin the season healthy. He struggled with shoulder troubles throughout '97.

The Trezelle Jenkins experiment at left tackle failed, but the Chiefs are diving back in and trying to develop rookie Victor Riley, another first-round pick, at that position. Riley played tackle and guard at Auburn, but the Chiefs are looking at him as an eventual starter on the left side, where he would protect Grbac's blind-side. They need Riley to contribute right away.

DEFENSE

LINE—The Chiefs are stacked from end to end. The biggest offseason improvement shows up here.

Kansas City Chiefs

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
17	Barnes, Pat	6-3/215	2-23-75	2	California	FA/97	0/0
12	Gannon, Rich	6-3/210	12-20-65	11	Delaware	FA/95	9/6
11	Grbac, Elvis	6-5/232	8-13-70	6	Michigan	FA/97	10/10
8	Tolliver, Billy Joe	6-1/217	2-7-66	8	Texas Tech	FA/97	9/1

Running Backs

38	Anders, Kimble (FB)	5-11/230	9-10-66	8	Houston	FA/91	15/14
30	Bennett, Donnell	6-0/232	9-14-72	5	Miami (Fla.)	D2/94	14/1
39	Blackwell, Ernest (FB)	6-2/242	8-7-75	R	Missouri	D7b/98	—
27	Bostic, James	5-11/225	3-13-72	3	Auburn	FA/98	0/0*
42	Haynes, Jesse	5-9/210	8-8-72	1	N.W. Missouri	FA/97	0/0
49	Richardson, Tony (FB)	6-1/237	12-17-71	4	Auburn	FA/95	14/0
43	Robinson, Greg	5-10/205	8-7-69	4	Northeast Louisiana	FA/97	0/0
22	Shehee, Rashaan	5-10/207	6-20-75	R	Washington	D3/98	—

Receivers

82	Alexander, Derrick	6-2/195	11-6-71	5	Michigan	FA/98	15/13*
88	Gonzalez, Tony (TE)	6-4/244	2-27-76	2	California	D1/97	16/0
84	Horn, Joe	6-1/199	1-16-72	3	Itawamba (Miss.) JC	D5/96	8/0
83	Hughes, Danan	6-2/211	12-11-70	6	Iowa	D7/93	16/1
9	Jones, Reggie	6-0/191	5-5-71	3	LSU (DNP football)	FA/97	0/0
81	Lockett, Kevin	6-0/177	9-8-74	2	Kansas State	D2/97	9/0
48	Popson, Ted (TE)	6-4/250	9-10-66	5	Portland State	FA/97	13/12
89	Rison, Andre	6-1/188	3-18-67	10	Michigan State	FA/97	16/16
87	Vanover, Tamarick	5-11/218	2-25-74	4	Florida State	D3a/95	16/0

Offensive Linemen

69	Criswell, Jeff (T)	6-7/294	3-7-64	12	Graceland (Iowa)	FA/95	16/16
61	Grunhard, Tim (C)	6-2/307	5-17-68	9	Notre Dame	D2/90	16/16
62	Parker, Glenn (T)	6-5/305	4-22-66	9	Arizona	FA/97	15/15
72	Parks, Nathan (T)	6-5/303	10-25-74	2	Stanford	D7/97	1/0
66	Riley, Victor (T)	6-5/321	11-4-74	R	Auburn	D1/98	—
68	Shields, Will (G)	6-3/305	9-15-71	6	Nebraska	D3/93	16/16
65	Smith, Jeff (C)	6-3/322	5-25-73	3	Tennessee	D7b/96	3/0
70	Spears, Marcus (T)	6-4/305	9-28-71	5	Northwestern State (La.)	FA/97	3/0
73	Swanson, Pete (T)	6-5/307	3-26-74	1	Stanford	FA/97	0/0
79	Szott, David (G)	6-4/293	12-12-67	9	Penn State	D7/90	16/16

Defensive Linemen

71	Barndt, Tom (T)	6-3/301	3-14-72	3	Pittsburgh	D6b/95	16/1
99	Booker, Vaughn (E)	6-5/295	2-24-68	5	Cincinnati	FA/94	13/13
93	Browning, John (E)	6-4/290	9-30-73	3	West Virginia	D3/96	14/13
90	Holland, Darius (T)	6-5/320	11-10-73	3	Colorado	T-GB/98	12/1*
77	McDaniels, Pellom (E)	6-3/285	2-21-68	6	Oregon State	FA/93	16/6
75	McGlockton, Chester (T/E)	6-4/315	9-16-69	7	Clemson	FA/98	16/16*
91	O'Neal, Leslie (E)	6-4/270	5-7-64	13	Oklahoma State	FA/98	15/14*
97	Parten, Ty (T)	6-5/295	10-13-69	4	Arizona	FA/97	2/0
95	Ransom, Derrick (T)	6-3/286	9-13-76	R	Cincinnati	D6/98	—
90	Williams, Dan (E)	6-4/290	12-15-69	6	Toledo	FA/97	15/6

Linebackers

50	Davis, Anthony	6-0/235	3-7-69	6	Utah	FA/94	15/15
59	Edwards, Donnie	6-2/236	4-6-73	3	UCLA	D4/96	16/16
54	Favors, Gregory	6-1/236	9-30-74	R	Mississippi State	D4/98	—
55	George, Ron	6-2/236	3-20-70	6	Stanford	FA/98	16/0*
51	Manusky, Greg	6-1/234	8-12-66	11	Colgate	FA/94	16/1
56	Simmons, Wayne	6-2/250	12-15-69	6	Clemson	T-GB/97	16/14
53	Smith, Mark	6-3/242	1-27-74	1	Arkansas	FA/97	0/0
58	Thomas, Derrick	6-3/247	1-1-67	10	Alabama	D1/89	12/10
90	Wooden, Terry	6-3/239	1-14-67	9	Syracuse	FA/97	15/8

Defensive Backs

26	Adams, Vashone (S)	5-10/196	9-12-73	3	Eastern Michigan	FA/98	5/4*
45	Brooks, Bucky (CB)	6-0/201	1-22-71	4	North Carolina	FA/97	9/0
34	Carter, Dale (CB)	6-1/188	11-28-69	7	Tennessee	D1/92	16/15
40	Hasty, James (CB)	6-0/208	5-23-65	11	Washington State	FA/95	16/15
25	Johnson, Melvin (S)	6-0/198	4-15-72	4	Kentucky	T-TB/98	16/7*
29	McMillian, Mark (CB)	5-7/148	4-29-70	7	Alabama	FA/97	16/2
41	Prior, Anthony (CB)	5-11/186	3-27-70	5	Washington State	FA/98	12/0*
31	Ross, Kevin (S)	5-9/185	1-16-62	15	Temple	FA/97	5/0
25	Tongue, Reggie (S)	6-0/201	4-11-73	3	Oregon State	D2/96	16/16
43	Warfield, Eric (S)	6-0/192	3-3-76	R	Nebraska	D7a/98	—
46	Williams, Robert (CB)	5-10/172	5-29-77	R	North Carolina	D5/98	—
21	Woods, Jerome (S)	6-2/200	3-17-73	3	Memphis	D1/96	16/16

Specialists

5	Aguiar, Louie (P)	6-2/218	6-30-66	8	Utah State	FA/94	16/0
10	Stoyanovich, Pete (K)	5-11/195	4-28-67	10	Indiana	T-MIA/96	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Reggie Clark, LB; Tavarr Cross, OT; Herb Coleman, DE; Kotto Cotton, WR; Matthew Dorsett, CB; Marcus Dowdell, WR; Kwame Ellis, CB; Hicham El-Mashtoub, C; Chad Flick, TE; Brian Gaine, TE; Jay Heimsoth, DT; Eric Hicks, DE; Kevin Huntley, WR; Damien Johnson, TE; Brad Kubik, G; Sean Manuel, TE; Shawn McWashington, WR; Brandon Moore, LB; Jim Moore, TE; Kavis Reed, CB; Terry Rice-Lockett, LB; Rod Thomas, CB; Vann Washington, S; Toussaint Waterman, WR.

*—Not with Chiefs in 1997.

Kansas City OFFENSE

Bennett Robinson
RB

Anders Richardson
FB

K: Stoyanovich
P: Aguiar
KR: Vanover, Hughes
PR: Vanover, Hughes

(QB) Grbac Gannon
(C) Grunhard Smith

Shields Kubik
RG

Parker Riley
RT

Gonzalez Popson
TE

Alexander Lockett
WR

Rison Hughes
WR

Criswell Riley
LT

Szott Kubik
LG

Shields Kubik
RG

Parker Riley
RT

Gonzalez Popson
TE

Alexander Lockett
WR

Hasty Brooks
CB

O'Neal Browning
RE

Williams Barndt
NT

McGlockton Holland
LE

Carter McMillian
CB

Simmons Favors
SLB

Edwards George
ILB

Davis Moore
WLB

Thomas McDaniels
LLB

Woods Johnson
FS

Tongue Ross
SS

Kansas City DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE NYERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Derrick Alexander, WR (FA/Ravens); Ron George, LB (FA/Vikings); Darius Holland, DT (trade/Packers); Melvin Johnson, FS (trade/Bucs); Chester McGlockton, DE (trade/Raiders); Leslie O'Neal, DE (FA/Rams).

Key losses: Marcus Allen, RB (retired); Vaughn Booker, DE (trade/Packers); Greg Hill, RB (released); Derrick Walker, TE (released).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Victor Riley	T	Auburn
3rd	Rashaan Shehee	RB	Washington
4th	Greg Favors	LB	Mississippi State
5th	Robert Williams	CB	North Carolina
6th	Derrick Ransom	DT	Cincinnati
7th	Eric Warfield	S	Nebraska
7th	Ernest Blackwell	RB	Missouri

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	None	
1994	RB Greg Hill	Unsigned free agent
1995	T Trezelle Jenkins	Reserve with Saints
1996	S Jerome Woods	Starter with Chiefs
1997	TE Tony Gonzalez	Starter with Chiefs

Coaching Staff

Coach: Marty Schottenheimer. **Offensive staff:** Jim Erkenbeck (tight ends) • Lionel James (running backs) • Mike McCarthy (quarterbacks) • Jimmy Raye (offensive coordinator) • Al Saunders (assistant head coach/receivers) • Brian Schottenheimer (offensive assistant/quality control) • Mike Solari (offensive line). **Defensive staff:** Gunther Cunningham (defensive coordinator) • Bob Karmelowicz (defensive line) • Woodrow Lowe (defensive and special

teams assistant) • Kurt Schottenheimer (defensive backs) • Darwin Wallis (quality control/defense). **Others:** Russ Ball (administrative assistant to the head coach) • Jeff Hurd (strength and conditioning) • Roberto Parker (assistant strength and conditioning) • Mike Stock (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 13-3 (1st in AFC West); 7-1 in division; 9-3 in conference; 8-0 at home; 5-3 on road.

1997 postseason record: Lost to Denver, 14-10, in divisional game.

Schottenheimer's regular-season record: 94-49-1 in nine seasons with Chiefs; 138-76-1 overall in 14 seasons with Chiefs and Browns.

Schottenheimer's postseason record: 3-7 in seven playoff appearances with Chiefs; 5-11 overall in 11 appearances with Chiefs and Browns.

Team record past five years: 55-25 (.688, ranks T2nd in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1996.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*316.5	9	14
Rushing offense	*135.7	4	5
Passing offense	*180.8	13	24
Scoring offense	375	3	T5
Total defense	*305	6	11
Rushing defense	*101.3	4	7
Passing defense	*203.7	5	16
Scoring defense	232	1	1
Takeaways	34	T1	T4
Giveaways	20	T1	T2
Turnover differential	14	1	3
Sacks	54	1	T3
Sacks allowed	32	T4	T5

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Elvis Grbac has the best winning percentage as a starter among active NFL quarterbacks:

Player, team	W-L-T (Pct.)
Elvis Grbac, Chiefs	14-5-0 (.737)
Steve Bono, Rams	28-12-0 (.700)
Kordell Stewart, Steelers	11-5-0 (.688)
Brett Favre, Packers	63-30-0 (.677)
Brad Johnson, Vikings	14-7-0 (.667)
Steve Young, 49ers	81-44-0 (.648)
John Elway, Broncos	138-80-1 (.632)
Dan Marino, Dolphins	132-81-0 (.620)

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	OAKLAND	7:20
Sept. 13	at Jacksonville	1:01
Sept. 20	SAN DIEGO	12:01
Sept. 27	at Philadelphia	1:01
Oct. 4	SEATTLE	7:20
Oct. 11	at New England	1:01
Oct. 18	Open date	
Oct. 26	PITTSBURGH (Mon.)	7:20
Nov. 1	N.Y. JETS	3:05
Nov. 8	at Seattle	1:15
Nov. 16	DENVER (Mon.)	7:20
Nov. 22	at San Diego	1:15
Nov. 29	ARIZONA	12:01
Dec. 6	at Denver	2:15
Dec. 13	DALLAS	3:15
Dec. 20	at N.Y. Giants	1:01
Dec. 26	at Oakland (Sat.)	1:05

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 19TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Denver	L	3-19
Sept. 8	at Oakland	W	28-27
Sept. 14	BUFFALO	W	22-16
Sept. 21	at Carolina	W	35-14
Sept. 28	SEATTLE (OT)	W	20-17
Oct. 5	at Miami	L	14-17
Oct. 12	Open date		
Oct. 16	SAN DIEGO	W	31-3
Oct. 26	at St. Louis	W	28-20
Nov. 3	PITTSBURGH	W	13-10
Nov. 9	at Jacksonville	L	10-24
Nov. 16	DENVER	W	24-22
Nov. 23	at Seattle	W	19-14
Nov. 30	SAN FRANCISCO	W	44-9
Dec. 7	OAKLAND	W	30-0
Dec. 14	at San Diego	W	29-7
Dec. 21	NEW ORLEANS	W	25-13
Jan. 4	DENVER*	L	10-14

*AFC divisional playoff game.

Miscellaneous

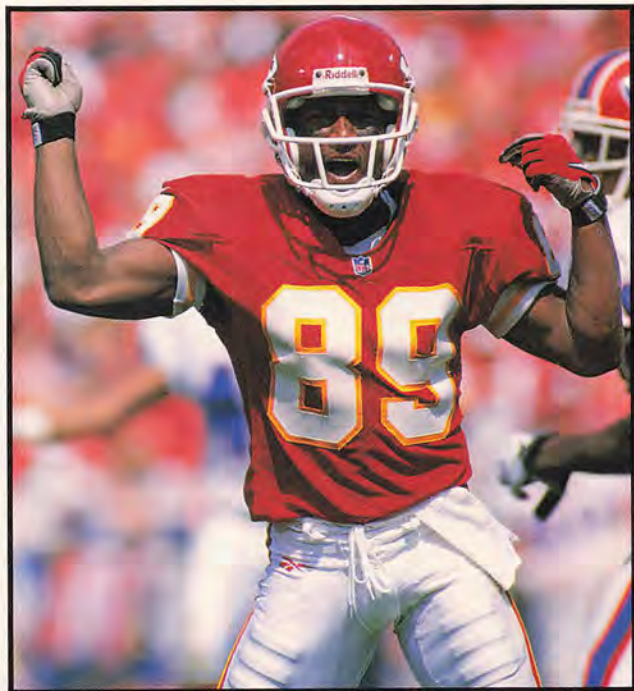
Founder: Lamar Hunt.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Arrowhead Stadium (79,101, grass).

Ticket information: 816-924-9400.

Flagship radio station: KCFX-FM, 101.1 FM.

Training site: University of Wisconsin-River Falls, River Falls, Wis.; 715-425-4580.



Rison proved to be a good fit in his first season. And the possibility for more production is there because of a stronger passing attack.

Kansas City has six guys competing for three starting spots. But defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham will start several giant leaps ahead as he tries to integrate McGlockton and O'Neal into his defense. He and those two go way back. Cunningham coached McGlockton for four years with the Raiders; McGlockton went to his first Pro Bowl, in 1994, under Cunningham. Before his stint with the Raiders, Cunningham was an assistant in San Diego, where O'Neal had 12½ sacks in 13 games as a rookie in 1986 before injuring his knee and missing the rest of that season and all of 1987.

If tackle Dan Williams, the Chiefs' franchise player, does play in '98, McGlockton would line up at left end next to Derrick Thomas—a roving linebacker who sometimes sets up on the line—with Williams in the middle and O'Neal on the opposite end on passing downs. This is assuming McGlockton wins the job on the left side and O'Neal unseats John Browning on the right.

Nose tackle Tom Barndt made some major strides switching to this side of the ball from the offensive line last season. He played mostly against the run in a rotation with Joe Phillips, who left in free agency, and will do the same this season with Darius Holland, who was acquired from Green Bay in a trade for Vaughn Booker. Depending on the situation, the Chiefs used a rotation of players on the line in '97 because of injuries. This season, they can do it because they have depth.

LINEBACKERS—The team's quartet is downright scary. Inside linebacker Donnie Edwards is the defensive leader and proved in '97 that he isn't too light to play inside. He pursues from sideline to sideline with great speed. With Anthony Davis playing the weakside, there is speed to spare.

Wayne Simmons, who plays the strongside, gives the Chiefs major muscle against tight ends and running backs. Simmons is likely to stay on the field regardless of the situation. The Chiefs want to use him more extensively as a pass rusher.

The "Falcon linebacker" experiment—the roving linebacker who sometimes lines up at end—didn't work as expected in '97, mainly because Thomas missed four games with a torn triceps. Pellom McDaniels—who filled in adequately for Thomas when he was hurt—will be Thomas' backup again.

SECONDARY—This area is the key to the defense. Cornerbacks Dale Carter and James Hasty, both Pro Bowl selections in '97, play fierce bump-and-run technique, which allows Cunningham to play the mad scientist when he puts together blitzing schemes.

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	A
Offensive backfield:	B-	Linebackers:	A
Offensive line:	B	Secondary:	B
Receivers:	A	Special teams:	B-

Mark McMillian, the designated nickel back in '97, intercepted eight passes. At 5-7, he is a small, tempting target for quarterbacks, who try to pick him apart, but he also is a tenacious, man-to-man defender.

Safety will continue to be a strong position as long as free safety Jerome Woods and strong safety Reggie Tongue play together. They became starters in '97 and quickly justified being the team's first- and second-round picks, respectively, in the 1996 draft. Both have the speed and toughness necessary.

Melvin Johnson, acquired in a trade with Tampa Bay, should be a solid backup at safety and a contributor on special teams. Kevin Ross, a 14-year veteran who is trying to come back from knee surgery last year, also could compete for a backup spot at safety. Bucky Brooks, rookie Robert Williams and Anthony Prior could help out at cornerback.

SPECIAL TEAMS

After a disappointing 1996 season, kicker Pete Stoyanovich made some huge field goals in '97, the most notable being an epic 54-yarder as time ran out that lifted the Chiefs to a 24-22 victory over Denver in the regular season. Stoyanovich has one of the most consistent legs in the AFC, but the concern about his kickoffs won't go away.

The problem is Stoyanovich does not put his kickoffs into the end zone regularly. The shorter kicks make life more challenging for the coverage teams, but the Chiefs usually live with it for a while before making a change. Louie Aguiar eventually has taken over those duties the past two seasons and probably will do so again in '98. Aguiar, the team's punter the past four seasons, had a 42.3-yard average last season and had 20 punts inside the 20, tying for the lead in the AFC.

The return game will be as healthy as Vanover, who is one of the strongest return men in the NFL, which leaves the Chiefs to wonder why he hasn't settled into a regular position on offense. Backup linebacker Greg Manusky and Hughes are the leaders on kickoff and punt coverage.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The final month of the '97 season was a cakewalk for the Chiefs, but December could get ugly this year. They play three of their final four games on the road—in Denver, New York (Giants) and Oakland, on the day after Christmas—where they suffered all three of their defeats last season.

The key here will be pacing. December is critical for the Chiefs, whether they win or lose. Winning games on the road obviously will be tough down the stretch. But winning may not be as important as how the Chiefs react to a tough stretch of games heading into the post-season. Their December schedule in '97, which was little more than a formality, obviously didn't help them in the playoffs.

The Chiefs, who usually do well in the spotlight of national TV, play six prime-time games, including their home opener against the Raiders on September 6 (ESPN).

BOTTOM LINE

The Chiefs have the defensive personnel to be competitive in every game and improve on their 13-3 record of a year ago. But a better record isn't necessarily the barometer. In the final analysis, the only thing that matters is the Chiefs proving they can advance beyond the first or second round of the playoffs.

TSN

Staff writer Luciana Chavez covers the Chiefs and Royals for THE SPORTING NEWS.



Old owner (Davis), new coach (Gruden) realize there's a rough road ahead

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 4th

BY RON KROICHICK

Jon Gruden wears the boyish, blonde-haired look of a teenager. He speaks in the deep, resonant voice of an established football coach. Raiders owner Al Davis fervently hopes the voice—and Gruden's sharp offensive mind—means better times for his sagging team.

Gruden, 35 on August 17, tackles one of the NFL's most daunting projects. He is just more than half Davis' age (69); their relationship will merit scrutiny as Gruden tries to pump life into this franchise.

Davis is running through coaches almost as quickly as he files lawsuits. Gruden becomes Oakland's fourth coach in five years, following Art Shell, Mike White and Joe Bugel. If nothing else, Davis seems to acknowledge the mess Gruden inherits. As he announced the hiring in January, Davis offered refreshing and long-missing candor in evaluating the state of his team. "I would say right now we have a ways to go," Davis said. "I'd rather start with that approach than give anyone the false hope that was given last year, relative to winning Super Bowls."

The Raiders followed with a strong draft, adding cornerback Charles Woodson and offensive tackle Mo Collins in the first round. This team remains an odd collection of underachievers—playoff spectators since 1993, fresh off Oakland's worst season (4-12) since before Davis took charge in January 1963.

Gruden faces long odds in his attempt to right this wobbly silver-and-black ship, especially in the demanding AFC West. He must win quickly, or Davis will send him trudging down the well-worn road out of town.

COACHING

Unlike his predecessors, Gruden owns a measure of authority after running the Eagles' West Coast offense for the past three seasons. The ugliness of 1997 convinced Davis to give his coach some space, so Gruden hired most of his assistants and had a strong voice in offseason personnel moves. That included the departures of defensive tackle Chester McGlockton and cornerback Larry Brown. Gruden is determined to improve the selfish, sulking attitude prevalent on Raiders teams in recent years—and unloading McGlockton and Brown was an unmistakable step forward.

The jury is out on Gruden as a head coach, but at least he carries himself like one. White and Bugel often were timid, afraid of asserting themselves. They seemed more concerned with placating Davis than with winning the respect of the players—and they lost touch on both fronts.

Gruden, conversely, spent the offseason establishing firm control of the team. His interaction with players left them with no doubt about his leadership ability and straightforward manner. Those are welcome changes in Raiders land.

Gruden will shoulder much of the responsibility himself. He will call the plays and offer hands-on supervision of the offense. Gruden plans to give defensive coordinator Willie Shaw considerable autonomy in trying to revive the league's worst defense.

Shaw, who had mixed results with the Rams in his first stint as an NFL defensive coordinator, faces a huge project. The Raiders must show more variety, rush the quarterback with more vigor and improve their tackling.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Amid the turmoil last season, Jeff George remained calm. For the most part, he defied his advance billing and was a model of decorum in the locker room. He occasionally criticized the play-calling of then-coordinator Ray Perkins, but that was about it.

Now comes the next hurdle—proving he can win.

George must adjust to another offensive system this season, as Gruden installs his version of the West Coast offense. The biggest difference for George is he will take more three- and five-step drops, with an emphasis on releasing the ball quickly. The change in style will test George's decision-making ability; he sometimes throws unwise passes



George had good numbers last season (3,917 yards, 29 touchdowns, nine interceptions) in every category except one—victories.

into tight coverage. That usually stems from boundless confidence in his mighty right arm, one of the strongest and most accurate in the league.

George put up eye-catching numbers in his first season with the Raiders, passing for 3,917 yards and 29 touchdowns with only nine interceptions. But unless George anchors a winning team, he will remain a notch below the league's top quarterbacks.

The Raiders still are seeking an adequate backup. They may re-sign David Klingler, who offers veteran insurance. This much is certain: George needs to stay healthy.

RUNNING BACKS—Gruden wants to become committed to the running game. Napoleon Kaufman gained 1,294 yards rushing last season, but the Raiders ran the ball a league-low 360 times. They fell behind frequently and seemed afraid of wearing out Kaufman or giving the ball to his colleagues.

The coaches must protect Kaufman, no question; at 5-9 and 185 pounds, he's one of the smallest starting backs in the league. At the same time, Kaufman has electrifying quickness and game-breaking speed in the open field. He averaged 17 carries per game last season and avoided injury. The Raiders should maximize Kaufman's opportunities on the outside, where he has room to roam. Too often last season, Kaufman burrowed into the

line, where he absorbed needless punishment.

Harvey Williams could offer some relief. Williams, a one-time 1,000-yard runner, became an afterthought in '97. Gruden plans to keep Williams involved, either in two-back formations with Kaufman or as the feature back when Kaufman needs a rest.

Tim Hall has climbed past Joe Aska into the role as Kaufman's backup. Chad Levitt also will challenge for time. But the youngster to watch is rookie fullback Jon Ritchie, who could become Kaufman's lead blocker. Ritchie also might carry the ball in goal-line and short-yardage situations.

RECEIVERS—It didn't take long for Tim Brown to become comfortable with George. Brown caught a career-high 104 passes last season, but he was dismayed by his relative inactivity on third down and in the red zone (five touchdowns)—something he expects will change this season.

The Raiders need Brown's partner, James Jett, to build on his breakthrough '97 season. Jett caught a team-high 12 touchdown passes, and not all came on fly patterns. He and George often hooked up on short routes, too, adding a new dimension to Jett's game.

George loves the huge target offered by 6-6 tight end Rickey Dudley; George frequently throws high passes toward Dudley, making it nearly impossible for defensive backs to deflect the ball. Dudley, like Jett, needs to expand on his strong '97 season. Only then will opponents stop double-teaming Brown.

Brown, Jett and Dudley offer one skill vital to Gruden's offensive system: They all run well after the catch. That's one of the enduring principles of the West Coast offense and something the Raiders need for this offense to work.

The search for a reliable third receiver remains fruitless; Desmond Howard, Kenny Shedd and Olanda Truitt scare few defensive backs. But the team is stacked at receiver, as long as the big three of Brown, Jett and Dudley remains healthy and productive.

LINE—All the marquee players—George and Kaufman, Brown and Dudley—mean little without sufficient blocking. And the line remains a source of vulnerability.

Four starters figure to return: Pat Harlow (left tackle), Steve Wisniewski (left guard), Barret Robbins (center) and Lincoln Kennedy (right tackle). Right guard Lester Holmes left for Arizona via free agency.

Holmes was inconsistent, so replacing him is hardly impossible. But a veteran guard couldn't be found in the early days of free agency, so one of the second-year linemen—Scott Whittaker, Tim Kohn or Adam Treu—needs to step forward. Another possibility at right guard is journeyman Rick Cunningham. The Raiders would prefer to keep Cunningham in the role he has filled the past two seasons—a versatile backup, able to help at tackle and also at guard, if needed.

Or the line might be juggled if Collins establishes himself. Collins played in a pass-happy program at Florida, so he should own polished pass-protection skills. His development could allow the moving of Kennedy to right guard and provide insurance against Harlow's chronic back problems.

No matter the formula, the line must improve against blitzes. The Raiders allowed 58 sacks last season, in part because they struggled to handle heavy pressure—which means they will see heavy pressure again.

DEFENSE

LINE—McGlockton's departure means the line now defines itself on the raw talent of Darrell Russell and the persistent work ethic of Russell Maryland. They will start at tackle, where stout work is needed against the run.

Oakland Raiders

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
3	George, Jeff	6-4/215	12-8-67	9	Illinois	FA/97	16/16
12	Hollas, Don	6-3/215	11-22-67	5	Rice	FA/97	0/0

Running Backs

35	Aska, Joe	5-11/240	7-14-72	4	Central Oklahoma	D3/95	7/0
27	Branch, Calvin	5-11/202	5-8-74	2	Colorado State	D6/97	6/0
48	Davison, Jerone (FB)	6-1/235	9-16-70	2	Arizona State	FA/96	8/1
45	Hall, Tim	5-11/218	2-15-74	3	Robert Morris	D6/96	16/0
26	Kaufman, Napoleon	5-9/185	6-7-73	4	Washington	D1/95	16/16
31	Levitt, Chad	6-1/231	11-21-75	2	Cornell	D4/97	10/2
	Ritchie, Jon (FB)	6-1/248	9-4-74	R	Stanford	D3/98	—
22	Williams, Harvey (FB)	6-2/225	4-22-67	8	LSU	FA/94	14/6

Receivers

	Brigham, Jeremy (TE)	6-4/250	3-22-75	R	Washington	D5a/98	—
86	Brown, Derek (TE)	6-6/264	3-31-70	6	Notre Dame	FA/98	13/7*
81	Brown, Tim	6-0/195	7-22-66	10	Notre Dame	D1/88	16/16
86	Cline, Tony (TE)	6-4/247	11-24-71	4	Stanford	D4c/95	10/1
83	Dudley, Rickey (TE)	6-6/250	7-15-72	3	Ohio State	D1/96	16/16
80	Howard, Desmond	5-10/180	5-15-70	7	Michigan	FA/97	15/0
82	Jett, James	5-10/165	12-28-70	6	West Virginia	FA/93	16/16
85	Mickens, Terry	6-0/201	2-21-71	5	Florida A&M	FA/98	11/0*
87	Mills, John Henry (TE)	6-0/235	10-31-69	6	Wake Forest	FA/97	16/0
89	Rosenstiel, Robert (TE)	6-3/240	2-7-74	1	Eastern Illinois	FA/97	4/0
84	Shedd, Kenny	5-10/171	2-14-71	4	Northern Iowa	FA/94	16/0
	Truitt, Olanda	6-0/195	1-4-71	6	Mississippi State	FA/96	14/0

Offensive Linemen

77	Ashmore, Darryl (T)	6-7/310	11-1-69	5	Northwestern	FA/98	11/2*
	Collins, Mo (T)	6-4/337	9-22-76	R	Florida	D1b/98	—
68	Cunningham, Rick (T)	6-7/315	1-4-67	7	Texas A&M	FA/96	7/0
	DiNapoli, Gennaro (G)	6-2/301	5-25-75	R	Virginia Tech	D4/98	—
77	Harlow, Pat (T)	6-6/290	3-16-69	8	USC	T-NE/96	16/16
72	Kennedy, Lincoln (G)	6-6/325	2-12-71	6	Washington	T-Alt/96	16/16
70	Kohn, Tim (T)	6-5/310	12-6-73	2	Iowa State	D3/97	0/0
63	Robbins, Barret (C)	6-3/315	8-26-73	4	TCU	D2/95	16/16
62	Treu, Adam (T)	6-5/304	6-24-74	2	Nebraska	D3/97	16/0
66	Whitley, Curtis (C)	6-1/295	5-10-69	7	Clemson	FA/97	15/1
78	Whittaker, Scott (T)	6-7/300	5-7-74	2	Kansas	FA/97	0/0
76	Wisniewski, Steve (G)	6-4/295	4-7-67	10	Penn State	D2/89	16/16

Defensive Linemen

	Amey, Vince (E)	6-3/289	2-9-75	R	Arizona State	D7b/98	—
95	Faumuli, Ta'ase (E)	6-3/278	3-19-71	3	Hawaii	FA/97	0/0
	Harris, James (E)	6-6/278	5-13-68	5	Temple	FA/98	0/0*
90	Jackson, Grady (E)	6-2/320	1-21-73	2	Knoxville (Tenn.) College	D6b/97	5/0
51	Johnstone, Lance (E)	6-4/252	6-11-73	3	Temple	D2/96	14/6
67	Maryland, Russell (T)	6-1/279	3-22-69	8	Miami (Fla.)	FA/96	16/16
96	Russell, Darrell (T)	6-5/310	5-27-76	2	USC	D1/97	16/10
	Sanders, David (E)	6-4/308	7-25-75	R	Arkansas	D7b/98	—
	Swilling, Pat (E)	6-3/245	10-25-64	13	Georgia Tech	FA/98	0/0

Linebackers

54	Biekert, Greg	6-2/240	3-14-69	6	Colorado	D7/93	16/16
99	Bruce, Aundray	6-5/265	4-30-66	10	Auburn	PlanB/92	10/3
	Folston, James	6-3/235	8-14-71	5	Northeast Louisiana	D2/94	16/7
57	Holmberg, Rob	6-3/230	5-6-71	5	Penn State	D7/94	16/0
50	Morton, Mike	6-4/235	3-28-72	4	North Carolina	D4/95	11/11
	Smith, Travian	6-3/238	8-26-75	R	Oklahoma	D5b/98	—
59	Wallace, Aaron	6-3/240	4-17-67	8	Texas A&M	D2/90	5/0

Defensive Backs

	Allen, Eric (CB)	5-10/180	11-22-65	11	Arizona State	T-NO/98	16/16
	Bates, Patrick (S)	6-3/220	11-27-70	4	Texas A&M	FA/98	0/0*
33	By'not'e, Butler (CB)	5-9/190	9-29-72	3	Ohio State	W-Den/95	0/0
20	Carter, Perry (CB)	6-0/190	8-15-71	2	Southern Miss	FA/96	16/7
25	Land, Dan (CB)	6-0/195	7-3-65	10	Albany (Ga.) State	FA/89	16/0
29	Lewis, Albert (CB)	6-2/205	10-6-60	16	Grambling State	FA/94	16/16
36	McDaniel, Terry (CB)	5-10/180	2-8-65	10	Tennessee	D1/88	13/12
30	Newman, Anthony (S)	6-0/200	11-21-65	11	Oregon	FA/98	12/12*
37	Trapp, James (CB)	6-0/185	12-28-69	6	Clemson	D3/93	16/16
29	Turner, Eric (S)	6-1/207	9-20-68	8	UCLA	FA/97	16/15
38	Walker, Marquis (CB)	5-10/180	7-6-72	3	Southeast Missouri St.	FA/98	10/0*
	Woodson, Charles (CB)	6-0/198	10-7-76	R	Michigan	D1a/98	—

Specialists

2	Araguz, Leo (P)	5-11/190	1-18-70	2	Stephen F. Austin	FA/96	16/0
5	Ford, Cole (K)	6-2/210	12-31-72	4	USC	FA/95	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Kenyan Branscomb, WR; Jason Davis, QB; Phil Dawson, K; Kevin Franklin, CB; Shay Muirbrook, LB; Kofi Nartey, S; Louis Riddick, S; Derrick Robinson, LB; Shatony Sargeant, DE; Jermaine Williams, RB; Rodney Williams, WR.

*—Not with Raiders in 1997.



Oakland OFFENSE

Kaufman
Hall



Williams
Ritchie



K: Ford/Dawson
P: Araguz
KR: Howard, Hall
PR: Howard, T. Brown

T. Brown
Truitt



Harlow
Collins



Wisniewski
Kohn



(QB) George
Hollas
(C) Robbins
Whitley



Cunningham
Whittaker



Kennedy
Treu



Dudley
D. Brown



Jett
Shedd



Woodson
Lewis



Swilling
Harris



Russell
Jackson



Maryland
Jackson



Johnstone
Bruce



Allen
McDaniel



Probable starters
listed on top

Folston
Smith



Turner
Land



Biekert
Mills



Newman
Trapp



Morton
Holmberg

Oakland
DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INYERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Eric Allen, CB (trade/Saints); Derek Brown, TE (FA/Jaguars); James Harris, DE (FA/Rams); Terry Mickens, WR (FA/Packers); Anthony Newman, SS (FA/Saints).

Key losses: Larry Brown, CB (released); Rob Fredrickson, LB (trade/Lions); Lester Holmes, G (FA/Cardinals); Chester McGlockton, DL (FA/Chiefs).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Charles Woodson	CB	Michigan
1st	Mo Collins	T	Florida
2nd	Leon Bender	DT	Washington State
3rd	Jon Ritchie	RB	Stanford
4th	Gennaro DiNapoli	G	Virginia Tech
5th	Jeremy Bringham	TE	Washington
5th	Travian Smith	LB	Oklahoma
7th	Vince Amey	DE	Arizona State
7th	David Sanders	DE	Arkansas

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	S Patrick Bates	Reserve with Raiders
1994	LB Rob Fredrickson	Starter with Lions
1995	RB Napoleon Kaufman	Starter with Raiders
1996	TE Rickey Dudley	Starter with Raiders
1997	DT Darrell Russell	Starter with Raiders

Coaching Staff

Coach: Jon Gruden. **Offensive staff:** Fred Biletnikoff (wide receivers) • Bill Callahan (offensive coordinator) • Skip Peete (running backs) • Keith Rowen (assistant head coach/offen-

sive line) • David Shaw (quality control/offense) • Gary Stevens (quarterbacks). **Defensive staff:** Dave Adolph (linebackers) • Chuck Bresnahan (defensive backs) • Willie Shaw (defensive coordinator) • Mike Wauflle (defensive line). **Others:** Frank Gansz Jr. (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 4-12 (T4th in AFC West); 2-6 in division; 2-10 in conference; 2-6 at home; 2-6 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Gruden's regular-season record: first season as NFL coach.

Gruden's postseason record: None.

Team record past five years: 38-42 (.475, ranks 15th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1993.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*318.9	8	13
Rushing offense	*99.3	T10	23
Passing offense	*219.6	6	8
Scoring offense	324	12	17
Total defense	*382.3	15	30
Rushing defense	*140.4	15	30
Passing defense	*241.9	15	30
Scoring defense	419	14	28
Takeaways	22	T14	T26
Giveaways	24	8	T13
Turnover differential	-2	10	18
Sacks	31	T12	T27
Sacks allowed	58	14	27

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

No team attempted fewer rushes in 1997 than the Raiders:

Team	Rushing attempts
Oakland	360
Arizona	395
New England	398
Seattle	404
San Diego	409
New Orleans	417
Baltimore	420
Buffalo	422
Dallas	423
Miami	430

1998 Schedule

All times for home team.

Sept. 6	at Kansas City	7:20
Sept. 13	N.Y. GIANTS	1:15
Sept. 20	DENVER	1:15
Sept. 27	at Dallas	12:01
Oct. 4	at Arizona	1:05
Oct. 11	SAN DIEGO	1:15
Oct. 18	Open date	
Oct. 25	CINCINNATI	1:15
Nov. 1	at Seattle	5:20
Nov. 8	at Baltimore	1:01
Nov. 15	SEATTLE	1:05
Nov. 22	at Denver	2:15
Nov. 29	WASHINGTON	1:15
Dec. 6	MIAMI	1:15
Dec. 13	at Buffalo	1:01
Dec. 20	at San Diego	1:05
Dec. 26	KANSAS CITY (Sat.)	1:05

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 9TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Tennessee (OT)	L	21-24
Sept. 8	KANSAS CITY	L	27-28
Sept. 14	at Atlanta	W	36-31
Sept. 21	at N.Y. Jets	L	22-23
Sept. 28	ST. LOUIS	W	35-17
Oct. 5	SAN DIEGO	L	10-25
Oct. 12	Open date		
Oct. 19	DENVER	W	28-25
Oct. 26	at Seattle	L	34-45
Nov. 2	at Carolina	L	14-38
Nov. 9	NEW ORLEANS	L	10-13
Nov. 16	at San Diego	W	38-13
Nov. 24	at Denver	L	3-31
Nov. 30	MIAMI	L	16-34
Dec. 7	at Kansas City	L	0-30
Dec. 14	SEATTLE	L	21-22
Dec. 21	JACKSONVILLE	L	9-20

Miscellaneous

President: Al Davis.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum (63,026, grass).

Ticket information: 800-949-2626.

Flagship radio station: KTCT-AM, 1050.

Training site: Napa, Calif.; 707-256-1000.



Brown meshed well with Jeff George in their first season together, but the receiver needs to be more involved in the red zone.

Russell, the second overall pick in the 1997 draft, is expected to blossom into a star. He played out of position most of his rookie season, at end. Now he returns to the spot he played at USC; he has the size to stop the run and the quickness to rush the passer.

The team was dealt a severe blow in May when second-round draft pick Leon Bender, who was expected to contribute at tackle, died suddenly of a seizure. The team was looking to sign another tackle at press time.

The Raiders signed defensive end Pat Swilling in order to improve their pass rush, but it's questionable how much Swilling has left at age 33. Lance Johnstone shows promise, but he struggled to maintain his weight last season. Johnstone has plenty of quickness, but his lack of size makes him vulnerable against the run. Swilling and Johnstone must come through if the Raiders are to improve their abysmal performance against the run and the pass.

LINEBACKERS—If history serves as a reliable guide, the Raiders will struggle to replace Rob Fredrickson. They promoted from within last season, to replace Mike Jones, and the results were underwhelming.

Barring a late free-agent acquisition, untested James Folston will get the chance to fill Fredrickson's old spot. Folston, a defensive end in college, impresses coaches with his athleticism. But this represents his first chance at a permanent starting job, in his fifth year in the league.

Like Folston, Mike Morton doesn't have striking speed or play-making ability. Morton will try to return from a serious back injury he suffered late last season. At the least, Folston and Morton need to become reliable tacklers.

Greg Biekert returns as the middle linebacker. Biekert can be a liability in pass coverage, but he is solid against the run and serves as the signal-calling conscience of the defense. And this defense needs a conscience.

The linebackers were one of the weakest links last season, when the defense ranked 30th in the league. Personnel changes seemed in order, but the Raiders chose to upgrade elsewhere. They might regret it.

SECONDARY—Here, the Raiders did not hesitate to make changes. They could end up with three new starters in the secondary—strong safety Anthony Newman and cornerbacks Woodson and Eric Allen.

Woodson's development will dictate the success of the secondary. They need immediate results—tight coverage, abundant interceptions and dynamic returns from Woodson, the fourth overall pick in the draft.

Allen and the ageless Albert Lewis should provide Woodson with sound guidance. Allen still has the ability to play solid man-to-man coverage; Lewis could thrive in nickel formations, defending the slot receiver.

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	C	Defensive line:	D
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	D
Offensive line:	C+	Secondary:	C
Receivers:	B+	Special teams:	C-

Former Pro Bowl cornerback Terry McDaniel may vanish from the picture altogether after two shaky seasons.

Newman will challenge James Trapp for the starting job at strong safety. Trapp is one of the NFL's fastest players, but he struggled last year to make the move from cornerback to safety. His inexperience showed in the way he positioned himself and the angles he took to the ball.

Newman arrives with considerable experience, an edge that should vault him past Trapp and into a starting role. Former first-round pick Patrick Bates also enters the mix, but he faces long odds after spending two of the past three seasons out of the league.

Free safety Eric Turner had his moments in his first season with the Raiders. They still need him to produce more turnovers and become a more reliable tackler.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The roster has too much speed for the special teams not to make an impact. Desmond Howard yearns to reach to the end zone, a place he did not visit in his first year with the Raiders.

Howard struggled on both kickoff returns (21.6 average) and punt returns (7.8 average). The explanation includes poor blocking and Howard's tentativeness. He needs to become bolder this season, shunning fair catches. Logic suggests Howard will become bold when he develops trust in his blocking. Too many young, inexperienced reserves were put on special teams last season. And it showed.

The Raiders want Howard to handle kickoff and punt returns. But they do have some viable alternatives; Woodson could expand his duties to include punt returns. And Tim Hall showed promise on kickoff returns last season.

Kicker Cole Ford wobbled through his second season in the league, making only 13-of-22 field-goal attempts. The Raiders lost faith in Ford and signed rookie free agent Phil Dawson. They will compete in camp.

The punting job belongs to Leo Araguz. Araguz was one of the few bright spots of 1997, leaning on impressive hang time to lead the AFC in net average (39.1).

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

As usual, the schedule falls into two categories. The Raiders face rugged competition in the AFC West, as they do every season. But their non-division schedule is reasonable, thanks to their fourth-place finish last season. The telling stretch will occur right away, when the team opens against three 1997 playoff teams: AFC West champion Kansas City (on the road), the NFC East champion Giants and Super Bowl champion Denver.

The next two games also are challenging—road games against Dallas and Arizona. The Raiders are prone to crumbling in times of crisis, so they cannot afford a slow start. If that happens, they could tumble out of sight before their October 18 bye.

At least there is solace in the schedule after the bye: Cincinnati, at Seattle, at Baltimore and Seattle. Not easy, maybe, but this stretch should give the Raiders a chance to climb back on their feet.

They face the possibility of only two truly cold-weather games, in Denver on November 22 and Buffalo on December 13. In other words, the Raiders cannot blame Mother Nature if they miss the playoffs once again.

BOTTOM LINE

The Raiders should have more variety in their game plans on both sides of the ball under Gruden. There still are abundant questions along the lines (and elsewhere on defense). The Raiders will be better, but that could mean only 6-10 or 7-9 in the AFC West. **TSN**

Ron Kroichick covers the Raiders for the San Francisco Chronicle.



Chargers' rebuilding job picks up speed, but the renovation still is far from over

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 5th

BY JAY PARIS

Ready to jump aboard the Chargers' Good Ship Lollipop? Everything is suddenly super in sunny San Diego. In a hectic offseason, the team drafted Ryan Leaf—a sturdy quarterback oozing with potential—welcomed back running back Natrone Means and rebuilt an offensive line that had been atrocious.

It's enough to make the last-place Chargers forget about the disaster of 1997. After a 4-12 season that was capped by an eight-game losing streak, can you blame them? But despite the good vibes flowing from southern California's lone team, all is not groovy. In spite of the promising additions, it's likely the Chargers will miss the playoffs for the third consecutive season.

Leaf, no doubt, will be good, maybe great, one day. But the expectations that a rookie quarterback—especially one skipping his senior year—can resurrect an inept team in one year isn't realistic. But you wouldn't know it by talking to Leaf, who has done little to quash the hype. "I'm looking forward to a 15-year career with a couple trips to the Super Bowl and a couple of parades downtown," he said.

Easy, youngster. You have to play like Montana—not simply hail from there—to achieve those lofty goals. And this Chargers team, though only 3½ years removed from the Super Bowl, is far from being showered with confetti.

COACHING

Kevin Gilbride's rookie season was a bomb. His club was beset by injuries, his hyped offense never got untracked and he locked horns with the media. Can he rebound? He better, because another 4-12 mark—the team's worst since '86—will have him searching the want ads. At least Gilbride has a better chance of succeeding this year—if the Chargers stay fit and the acquisitions pan out. His offensive line could improve from bad to decent, a must if his quarterback is to have time to execute a complex offense.

But it will be interesting to see how much Gilbride learned from his rookie season. He simply spread himself too thin last year, trying to control every facet of the team. Gilbride needs to take advantage of two former coaches who have been added to his staff—Joe Bugel and June Jones—while spreading the day-to-day responsibilities. He also needs to accept some of the blame when things go bad.

Does Gilbride have what it takes? Tough to say, though he did little last year to disprove the speculation that he is nothing more than a successful offensive coordinator.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—As good as Leaf figures to be, this fact remains: The Chargers enter the season without a quarterback who has an NFL win on his resume.

Leaf likely will be brought along slowly, which means Craig Whelihan should open as the starter. Whelihan lost all seven of his starts last year when filling in for Stan Humphries, who retired after a series of concussions. The other option is Casey Weldon, who was playing flag football a year ago.

Though Whelihan probably will start, he'll do so with one eye peeking over his shoulder. The clamor to get Leaf into the lineup will be tremendous, especially if the Chargers struggle early. Leaf—a brash, confident gunslinger type from Washington State—might be up to taking the lumps every rookie quarterback has to withstand.



It's doubtful everything will come up roses for Leaf this year. It's hard for a rookie QB to make a big impact, especially on a team with so many questions.

In addition to Leaf's strong arm, Gilbride was impressed with Leaf's ability to change calls at the line of scrimmage last year. In Gilbride's system of making reads and adjustments before and after the snap, Leaf could have a leg up on absorbing the offense. That can't be overlooked, as some players said they still were struggling to learn the offense late in the season.

RUNNING BACKS—Means is back in a Chargers uniform, which never seemed possible after he was dumped unceremoniously by San Diego after the '95 season. If Means runs like he did for the Chargers in 1994—a franchise-high 1,350 yards; a career-best 12 touchdowns—the Chargers will be ecstatic. But he didn't show the desired durability the past two years in Jacksonville, where he often split time with James Stewart.

But Means still is relatively young (26) and he's in tremendous shape—something that wasn't always true his first go-round in San Diego. The Chargers are sure Means will be an improvement over

the departed Gary Brown because Means gives them more explosiveness hitting the hole and the potential of bouncing it outside. While Means and Brown focus their games between the tackles, the Chargers are hoping Means' younger legs and quickness translate into some long gainers.

A bigger mystery is what's behind Means. Terrell Fletcher is an effective smaller back, but he can't take the punishment of a heavy rushing load. And Kenny Bynum is a burner, but he has yet to sell Gilbride on his talents. If Means goes down, the lack of depth in the backfield could be disastrous—not only to the running game, but to the quarterback situation because whatever inexperienced quarterback is in control would face even more pressure.

The running game should be better because of the upgraded line. Last year, the Chargers' ground attack ranked 28th in the league and recorded an NFL-low five rushing touchdowns.

RECEIVERS—In June, the Chargers suprisingly traded Tony Martin, a Pro Bowler in '96, to the Falcons. That means Bryan Still must come through. Still has been a big disappointment since the team burned a No. 1 in order to draft him in the second round in '96; he has yet to score a touchdown.

Charlie Jones should start opposite Still. Jones has to bounce back from a so-so second season. Second-round pick Mikhael Ricks, a tempting target at 6-5, has to prove he was worth a future No. 1 and that he can make the jump from Division I-AA Stephen F. Austin. He must be a cog in the passing game this season. Tight end Freddie Jones, a pleasant surprise as a rookie, will be an important part of Gilbride's short-passing attack.

Still is the key. The Chargers have waited patiently for him to have an impact. He spent most of last season in Gilbride's doghouse because of a casual attitude about becoming a top-notch receiver.

The team added Webster Slaughter as much for his leadership as his receiving. If Slaughter can squeeze out another season—he didn't play last year—the Chargers would be pleased. But even if he doesn't contribute much in games, the team is hopeful its younger receivers will recognize what the hard-working Slaughter does to prepare himself. The lackadaisical Still, among others, could learn plenty from this 11-year pro.

LINE—This unit took major strides when G.M. Bobby Beathard secured free agents John Jackson, Aaron Taylor and Roman Fortin. They add experience and skill—something that was sorely missing last year when two quarterbacks suffered season-ending injuries and the line allowed 51 sacks. Jackson will play left tackle, with Vaughn Parker switching to right tackle, the position he played at UCLA. Taylor is the left guard, with Fortin expected to play center.

The newcomers will force Raleigh McKenzie to right guard. With the influx of veteran talent, depth is bolstered with two of last year's starters, Tony Berti and Troy Sienkiewicz.

Another important addition is Joe Bugel as line coach. Relieved to be out of Oakland, he is inspired to produce the efficiency that stamped the Hogs when he and Beathard were with the Redskins. With last year's personnel, that would have taken a grand coaching performance. With the improved personnel this year, Bugel's task is much easier.

DEFENSE

LINE—Really, it's OK to sack the quarterback. Maybe that point was lost on the line last year. On

San Diego Chargers

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
16	Leaf, Ryan	6-5/240	5-15-76	R	Washington State	D1/98	—
11	Weldon, Casey	6-1/206	2-3-69	4	Florida State	FA/97	0/0
5	Whelihan, Craig	6-5/220	4-15-71	4	Pacific	D6c/95	9/7

Running Backs

43	Bynum, Kenny	5-11/191	5-29-74	2	South Carolina State	D5a/97	13/0
32	Chancey, Robert (FB)	6-0/260	9-7-72	2	None	FA/97	6/0
26	Filer, Rodney (FB)	6-1/235	6-14-74	1	Iowa	FA/97	0/0
41	Fletcher, Terrell	5-8/196	9-14-73	4	Wisconsin	D2b/95	13/1
4	Means, Natrone	5-10/245	4-26-72	6	North Carolina	FA/98	14/11*

Receivers

83	Burke, John (TE)	6-3/248	9-7-71	4	Virginia Tech	FA/98	7/1*
89	Hartley, Frank (TE)	6-2/268	12-15-67	5	Illinois	FA/97	16/16
82	Jones, Charlie	5-8/175	12-1-72	3	Fresno State	D4/96	16/11
88	Jones, Freddie (TE)	6-4/260	9-16-74	2	North Carolina	D2/97	13/8
85	Rachal, Latario	5-11/183	1-31-73	2	Fresno State	FA/97	14/0
10	Ricks, Mikhael	6-5/237	11-14-74	R	Stephen F. Austin	D2/98	—
87	Roche, Brian (TE)	6-4/255	5-5-73	3	San Jose State	D3/96	5/0
	Rodgers, Anthony	6-3/190	12-11-73	1	Cal State Northridge	FA/97	0/0
19	Sanford, Kio	5-10/180	1-8-75	R	Kentucky	D7b/98	—
84	Slaughter, Webster	6-1/175	10-19-64	11	San Diego State	FA/98	0/0*
80	Still, Bryan	5-11/174	6-3-74	3	Virginia Tech	D2a/96	15/4

Offensive Linemen

75	Berti, Tony (T)	6-6/300	6-21-72	4	Colorado	D6d/95	16/16
50	Binn, Dave (C)	6-3/240	2-6-72	5	California	FA/94	16/0
69	Bordelon, Ben (T)	6-4/291	4-9-74	2	LSU	FA/97	16/2
60	Engel, Greg (C)	6-3/285	1-18-71	5	Illinois	FA/94	9/0
67	Fortin, Roman (C)	6-5/297	2-26-67	9	San Diego State	FA/98	3/3*
65	Jackson, John (T)	6-6/297	1-4-65	11	Eastern Kentucky	FA/98	16/16*
63	McKenzie, Raleigh (C)	6-2/283	2-8-63	14	Tennessee	FA/97	16/16
66	Mills, Jim (T)	6-4/290	3-30-73	3	Idaho	D6a/96	1/0
70	Parker, Vaughn (T)	6-3/296	6-5-71	5	UCLA	D2b/94	16/16
79	Price, Marcus (T)	6-6/321	3-3-72	2	LSU	FA/97	2/0
74	Roundtree, Raleigh (T)	6-4/295	8-31-75	2	South Carolina State	D4/97	0/0
72	Sienkiewicz, Troy (G)	6-5/310	5-27-72	4	New Mexico State	D6a/95	14/6
73	Taylor, Aaron (G)	6-4/305	11-14-72	5	Notre Dame	FA/98	14/14*

Defensive Linemen

90	Coleman, Marco (E)	6-3/267	12-18-69	7	Georgia Tech	FA/96	16/16
93	Davis, Reuben (T)	6-5/320	5-7-65	11	North Carolina	FA/94	0/0
95	Fuller, William (E)	6-3/280	3-8-62	13	North Carolina	FA/97	16/16
96	Hand, Norman (T)	6-3/313	9-4-72	4	Mississippi	W-Mia/97	15/1
92	Harden, Cedric (E)	6-6/260	10-19-74	R	Florida A&M	D5/98	—
99	Johnson, Raylee (E)	6-3/265	6-1-70	6	Arkansas	D4a/93	16/0
98	Lee, Shawn (T)	6-2/300	10-24-66	11	North Alabama	FA/92	16/15
94	Mohring, Mike (T)	6-5/295	3-22-74	1	Pittsburgh	FA/97	2/0
97	Parrella, John (T)	6-3/290	11-22-69	6	Nebraska	FA/94	16/16
91	Tuinei, Van (E)	6-3/266	2-16-71	2	Arizona	FA/97	3/0

Linebackers

52	Burgess, James	5-11/230	3-31-74	2	Miami (Fla.)	FA/97	15/4
58	Bush, Lew	6-2/245	12-2-69	6	Washington State	D4b/93	14/13
51	Dixon, Gerald	6-3/250	6-20-69	6	South Carolina	FA/98	15/13*
54	Gouveia, Kurt	6-1/240	9-14-64	13	Brigham Young	FA/96	7/6
53	Hamilton, Michael	6-2/244	12-3-73	2	North Carolina A&T	D3/97	6/0
57	Haskins, Jon	6-2/245	10-6-75	R	Stanford	D7a/98	—
59	James, Toran	6-3/247	3-8-74	2	North Carolina A&T	D7a/97	14/0
55	Seau, Junior	6-3/250	1-19-69	9	USC	D1/90	15/15

Defensive Backs

25	Bradford, Paul (CB)	5-9/185	4-20-74	2	Portland State	D5b/97	15/4
22	Brew, Dorian (CB)	5-10/182	7-19-74	3	Kansas	FA/98	9/0*
20	Dumas, Mike (S)	6-0/202	3-18-69	6	Indiana	FA/95	16/15
28	Harper, Dwayne (CB)	5-11/175	3-29-66	11	South Carolina State	FA/94	12/12
37	Harrison, Rodney (S)	6-0/201	12-15-72	5	Western Illinois	D5b/94	16/16
31	Ivory, Clifford (CB)	5-11/183	8-1-75	R	Troy State	D6/98	—
42	Jackson, Greg (S)	6-1/217	8-20-66	10	LSU	FA/97	13/0
40	Montreuil, Mark (CB)	6-2/200	12-29-71	4	Concordia (Canada)	D7/95	6/1
29	Shaw, Terrance (CB)	5-11/190	11-11-73	4	Stephen F. Austin State	D2a/95	16/16
47	Thomas, Johnny (CB)	5-9/191	8-3-64	10	Baylor	FA/97	0/0
23	Williams, Gerome (S)	6-2/210	7-9-73	2	Houston	FA/97	6/0

Specialists

2	Bennett, Darren (P)	6-5/235	1-9-65	4	None	FA/94	16/0
3	Carney, John (K)	5-11/170	4-20-64	10	Notre Dame	FA/90	4/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Jeff Baker, QB; Marcus Bradley, S; Tyrone Brown, WR; Jim Buzzard, G; Bart Conley, LB; Wendell Davis, TE; Patrick Downey, C; Jeremy Earp, WR; Dan Gmelin, WR; Domingo Graham, T; Carlton Hall, LB; Dayroni Harris, DE; Kendyl Jacox, C; Lajohn Jones, LB; Terrance Joseph, S; Troy Kopp, QB; Greg Lee, S; Lloyd Lee, S; Tim Roth, K/P; Eric Smith, TE; Jay Stallworth, DE; Tremayne Stephens, RB; Jason Suttle, CB; Henry Taylor, DT; Tyrone Taylor, WR; Champ Traylor, TE; Justin Watson, RB.

*—Not with Chargers in 1997.

San Diego OFFENSE

Means Fletcher
RB

(QB) Whelihan Leaf
(C) Fortin McKenzie

Chancey Filer
FB

K: Carney
P: Bennett
KR: Rachal, Bynum
PR: C. Jones, Still

C. Jones Ricks
WR

Jackson Parker
LT

Taylor Mills
LG

McKenzie Berti
RG

Parker Price
RT

F. Jones Burke
TE

Still Slaughter
WR

Harper Bradford
CB

Coleman Harden
RE

Davis Hand
RT

Parrella Lee
LT

Fuller Johnson
LE

Shaw Montreuil
CB

Seau James
WLB

Gouveia Seau
MLB

Bush Hamilton
SLB

Probable starters listed on top

Dumas Jackson
FB

Harrison Williams
SS

San Diego DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: John Burke, TE (FA/Jets); Gerald Dixon, LB (FA/Bengals); Roman Fortin C (FA/Falcons); John Jackson, OT (FA/Steelers); Natrone Means, RB (FA/Jaguars); Aaron Taylor, LG (FA/Packers).

Key losses: Gary Brown, RB (FA/Giants); Greg Davis, K (released); Jim Everett, QB (released); Stan Humphries, QB (retired); Tony Martin, WR (trade/Falcons); Eric Metcalf, PR/WR (trade/Cardinals); Aaron Craver, FB (FA/Saints).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Ryan Leaf	QB	Washington State
2nd	Mikhael Ricks	WR	Stephen F. Austin
5th	Cedric Harden	DE	Florida A&M
6th	Clifford Ivory	CB	Troy State
7th	Jon Haskins	LB	Stanford
7th	Kio Sanford	WR	Kentucky

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	CB Darrien Gordon	Reserve with Broncos
1994	None	
1995	None	
1996	None	
1997	None	

Coaching Staff

Coach: Kevin Gilbride • Nick Nicolau (assistant head coach).
Offensive staff: Joe Bugel (offensive line) • Mike Cavanaugh (quality control/offense) • June Jones (quarterbacks) • Bill MacDermott (tight ends) • Mike Sheppard (offensive coordinator/wide receivers) • Ollie Wilson (running backs). **Defensive staff:** Kevin Lempa (administrative assistant/defense) • Wayne Nunnely (defensive line) • Joe Pascale (defensive

coordinator) • Rod Perry (defensive backs) • Jim Vechiarella (linebackers). **Others:** John Hastings (strength and conditioning) • Frank Novak (special teams) • Derrell Pasquale (quality control/ special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 4-12 (T4th in AFC West); 1-7 in division; 3-9 in conference; 2-6 at home; 2-6 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Gilbride's regular-season record: 4-12 in one season with Chargers.

Gilbride's postseason record: None.

Team record past five years: 40-40 (.500, ranks 14th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1995.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*281.6	15	28
Rushing offense	*88.5	14	28
Passing offense	*193.1	11	21
Scoring offense	266	14	26
Total defense	*322.9	8	21
Rushing defense	*106.1	6	11
Passing defense	*216.8	10	23
Scoring defense	425	15	30
Takeaways	26	10	T19
Giveaways	35	14	25
Turnover differential	-9	14	25
Sacks	27	15	30
Sacks allowed	51	13	25

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

No team was worse inside the 20 last season than the Chargers, who scored just 10 TDs in 40 trips. The bottom 10:

Team	Poss.	TD	FG	TD%
San Diego	40	10	19	25.0
Dallas	54	19	27	35.2
N.Y. Jets	55	21	21	38.2
Chicago	46	19	14	41.3
Miami	56	24	24	42.9
Indianapolis	52	23	21	44.2
Buffalo	38	17	14	44.7
St. Louis	49	22	14	44.9
Seattle	44	20	16	45.5
Carolina	45	21	15	46.7

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	BUFFALO	1:15
Sept. 13	at Tennessee	12:01
Sept. 20	at Kansas City	12:01
Sept. 27	N.Y. GIANTS	1:15
Oct. 4	at Indianapolis	12:01
Oct. 11	at Oakland	1:15
Oct. 18	PHILADELPHIA	1:15
Oct. 25	SEATTLE	1:15
Nov. 1	Open date	
Nov. 8	at Denver	2:15
Nov. 15	BALTIMORE	1:05
Nov. 22	KANSAS CITY	1:15
Nov. 29	DENVER	5:20
Dec. 6	at Washington	1:01
Dec. 13	at Seattle	1:05
Dec. 20	OAKLAND	1:05
Dec. 27	at Arizona	2:15

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 14TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at New England	L	7-41
Sept. 7	at New Orleans	W	20-6
Sept. 14	CAROLINA	L	7-26
Sept. 21	at Seattle	L	22-26
Sept. 28	BALTIMORE	W	21-17
Oct. 5	at Oakland	W	25-10
Oct. 12	Open date		
Oct. 16	at Kansas City	L	3-31
Oct. 26	INDIANAPOLIS	W	35-19
Nov. 2	at Cincinnati	L	31-38
Nov. 9	SEATTLE	L	31-37
Nov. 16	OAKLAND	L	13-38
Nov. 23	at San Francisco	L	10-17
Nov. 30	DENVER	L	28-38
Dec. 7	ATLANTA	L	3-14
Dec. 14	KANSAS CITY	L	7-29
Dec. 21	at Denver	L	3-38

Miscellaneous

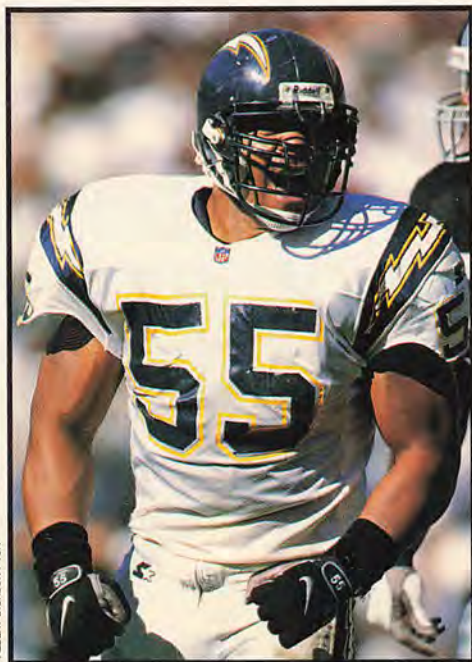
Chairman: Alex G. Spanos.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Qualcomm Stadium (71,000, grass).

Ticket information: 619-280-2121.

Flagship radio station: KFMB-AM, 760; STAR-FM, 100.7.

Training site: UC San Diego, La Jolla, Calif.; 619-874-4500.



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

Seau still is one of the best linebackers around. But the pace at which he plays the game has taken its toll on his body.

a defense that managed a league-low 27 sacks, the line could muster but 15. End William Fuller, 36, gets another chance to show there's something left in his tank after a dismal '97—three sacks, his worst showing since '87. On the other side is Marco Coleman, who produced two sacks. Coleman is decent against the run, but the name of the game—especially in the pass-happy AFC West—is reaching the quarterback. And that's a consistent problem for the Chargers.

The middle gets a boost with the return of Reuben Davis, the team's top run-stuffer who missed last season with an Achilles' injury. John Parrella probably will start ahead of the inconsistent Shawn Lee at the other tackle spot. Parrella's effort is never questioned.

Keep an eye on Cedric Harden, a fifth-round pick from Florida A&M. Harden opened some eyes during offseason workouts with his quickness and ability to get to the quarterback. Considering the team's woeful pass rush, he'll get every opportunity to show what he can do.

LINEBACKERS—Any time Junior Seau is part of your linebacking corps, that's a plus. And though Seau's motor is always revved high, his physical approach to the game doesn't come without costs. Despite a pain tolerance that is among the highest on the team, he now has to make concessions for playing like a Tasmanian devil the past eight years. There's a knee injury that refuses to go away and other nicks that could slow him down. But Seau is the least of the team's problems.

It's wishful thinking to count on inside 'backer Kurt Gouveia lasting the season. Not only has he absorbed 12 years in the middle, he's coming off neck surgery. The team claims he is fine, but one can't discount the punishment his body has taken.

Lewis Bush will man the strongside, and he does a workmanlike job. His biggest asset might be his versatility. When injuries ravaged the linebacking corps last year, Bush proved he could play all three positions.

Gerald Dixon was a nice pickup—for depth and his pass-rushing skills. His 8½ sacks hardly solicited much attention last year with the Bengals, but that same output would have made him the Chargers' leader.

The key to this unit, other than Seau, is Gouveia's health. If he goes down again, it creates a domino effect that forces two starters to play out of position.

SECONDARY—Hard-hitting Rodney Harrison continues his ascent toward becoming one of the NFL's top safeties. His stellar year at strong safety was obscured by the Chargers' woeful season. But if he keeps improving, he could become a Pro Bowl player.

Free safety Michael Dumas revived his career last year—he missed '96 with injuries—and had a decent season; his 93 tackles were No. 3 on the team. He is a solid pro who seems to always be around the ballcarrier.

Cornerback Dwayne Harper is the team's top cover man, but he has

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	D	Defensive line:	C-
Offensive backfield:	C	Linebackers:	C
Offensive line:	B-	Secondary:	C
Receivers:	C-	Special teams:	C+

trouble staying on the field. He has failed to finish the past two seasons because of hamstring injuries. If he's fit, he is a dependable corner. Terrance Shaw, the other corner, has an aggressive style that delivers two things: physical play and more than his share of pass interference calls. Shaw is in the final year of his contract and is motivated to have a big year.

The nickel back remains a question mark. Mark Montreuil and Paul Bradford have yet to prove they can provide adequate coverage on a consistent basis. As a result, the Chargers are playing with fire in a division that features John Elway, Warren Moon and Jeff George.

If Harper goes down again, the Chargers don't have the necessary depth to cover his position and plug in a nickel back. Two rookies from Division I-AA schools could be asked to help fill the void: Clifford Ivory, a sixth-round pick from Troy State, and Lloyd Lee, a free-agent pickup from Dartmouth.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The price for moving up to draft Leaf included receiver Eric Metcalf, who returned three punts for scores last year. The Chargers will be hard-pressed to duplicate that kind of production. Among the candidates for the job are Charlie Jones and Still. Kickoff returns will be handled by Latario Rachal.

It's imperative the Chargers improve their coverage units, especially on kickoffs. Only the Bills allowed a higher average per return than the Chargers' 24.1. Because of injuries, the special teams often employed inexperienced players—and it showed.

Kicker John Carney is back after missing most of '97 with a knee injury. He is the Chargers' leading career scorer and No. 2 on the NFL's all-time list for field-goal accuracy. Darren Bennett is among the AFC's top punters, not only for distance but placement.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

There are two benefits of a horrid season: a high draft pick and a cushy schedule. In the name of parity, the NFL has done its best to help the Chargers get their share of wins. They have only five games against playoff teams, including the Broncos and Chiefs twice each. And the composite '97 record of their opponents is 125-127-4 (.496). Among the patsies lined up are the Colts, Raiders (twice), Cardinals, Ravens, Bills and Eagles. Of course, those teams are saying the same thing about having the Chargers on their schedule.

In the first half of the season, the Chargers play but two teams that were better than .500 last year (Chiefs and Giants). In addition, the Chargers don't have more than two consecutive road games all season. Worried about the weather? The Chargers have only one potential late-season, bad-weather game—December 6 at Washington.

BOTTOM LINE

Despite all the changes, this figures to be Rebuilding Year No. 2 under Gilbride in the competitive AFC West. Yes, Leaf has enormous potential, but teams seldom win without an experienced quarterback. And the Chargers won't be the exception, though Leaf, a retooled offensive line and Means should spur improvement.

The pass rush? Good question. The team did little in the offseason to upgrade that area. Seau is solid, but with experience comes battle scars. He has been asked to do too much for too long. If nothing else, another bad season translates into another high pick. Too bad Beathard already has peddled next year's first-round pick. Have patience, Chargers fans. The team is turning over a new Leaf, but it will mean another long season.

TSN

Jay Paris covers the Chargers for the North County Times in Escondido, Calif.



Seahawks are ready to win right now —and the pressure's on to do so

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 3rd

BY CLARE FARNSWORTH

The Seattle Seahawks are in a hurry. They can't wait to prove they're playoff worthy, ending the second-longest postseason drought in the NFL at nine seasons, not to mention posting their first winning record since 1990.

They're eager to erase the memories of last year's losses to the Saints, Falcons and Ravens, embarrassing reminders of a late-season, four-game losing streak that pushed the Seahawks from the threshold of the postseason to the trash bin of another disappointing 8-8 campaign.

They're salivating over the thought of what a second consecutive aggressive offseason of acquiring talent can do for a team that last year joined the Broncos, Packers and Steelers as the only clubs in the league to rank in the top 10 in total offense and defense.

Another two-fisted dip into the billionaire-deep pockets of owner Paul Allen produced almost \$15 million in signing bonuses given to free agents Ricky Watters, Kevin Glover, Darrin Smith, Brian Habib and Jeff Feagles. This after doling out nearly \$23 million in signing bonuses last year to free agents Chad Brown, Willie Williams, Warren Moon, Bennie Blades and Dan Saleaumua and first-round picks Shawn Springs and Walter Jones.

The pieces seem to be in place. Finally. After another offseason of uncertainty and innuendo, Dennis Erickson enters his fourth year as coach with a team—*his team*—that can assure he and everything everyone has worked so hard to build will remain standing next season and beyond. And the pressure is on to produce a winning season.

"The pressure I feel, I put on myself because I want to win," said Erickson, who was hired in 1995 after Tom Flores produced just 14 victories in three seasons. "I want to get to the playoffs and do the things we were brought here to do. I expect us to win."

And in a hurry.

COACHING

Erickson's overhaul of this team—tackle Howard Ballard, defensive end Michael Sinclair and defensive tackle Cortez Kennedy are the only starters who remain from the club he inherited—has spread to his staff.

The prolonged and unsuccessful search for a general manager by club president Bob Whitsitt and the resultant uncertainty about Erickson's status caused five assistants to take jobs with other clubs. Three of them were among the most experienced coaches on a staff top heavy with assistants Erickson brought with him from the University of Miami.

Offensive line coach Howard Mudd and linebackers coach Mike Murphy joined Jim Mora's Colts staff and running backs coach Clarence Shelmon jumped to the Cowboys. They have been replaced by former Raiders assistant Bill Meyers (who will help holdover Gregg Smith coach the offensive line), former Colts defensive coordinator Jim Johnson and Purdue offensive co-coordinator Tim Lappano.

But the biggest change, and a definite upgrade, was luring Pete Rodriguez from the Redskins to revamp special teams units that faltered during the late-season swoon. Other new faces are receivers coach Milt Jackson and quality control coaches Eric Yarber and Winston Moss.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Erickson's spread-the-field offense proved to



Galloway is the centerpiece of a surprisingly good group of Seattle receivers. He worked especially well with new quarterback Warren Moon last season.

be user-friendly for Moon in his first season with the Seahawks. Signed to be the backup, Moon came on after John Friesz fractured his right thumb in the season opener and passed for a club-record 3,678 yards. Now, it's Moon who is the man and Friesz the backup, with the inexperienced but impressive Jon Kitna joining them to create what Erickson calls "a quarterback situation that is as good as any in the league."

Still, Moon will be 42 in November. He brings a touch of the run-and-shoot that he flourished in while with the Oilers and blends it nicely with Erickson's distribute-the-wealth philosophy. The Seahawks need a 16-game run of full Moon performances, and in turn the ageless Moon needs better protection and a more consistent running game than the Seahawks provided him last year.

RUNNING BACKS—Chris Warren is the Seahawks' leading career rusher, but he never fit Erickson's system and is now with the

Cowboys. Lamar Smith might have fit, but he missed time with injuries in two of the past three seasons, then signed with the Saints in free agency.

To fill the void, Erickson signed the one back who seemingly has the ingredients to complete the recipe: Watters. With his arrival from the Eagles via free agency, and the departures of Warren and Smith, Erickson won't have to continue the running-game-by-rotation system that he never really wanted to use. Watters has averaged 1,100 yards rushing and 50 receptions in the past six seasons.

The Seahawks also added Nebraska's Ahman Green, a third-round pick, and re-signed Steve Broussard, who was valuable as a role player last year.

At fullback, a little-used position the past three seasons, Mack Strong returns.

RECEIVERS—In his first three seasons, Joey Galloway has put up better numbers than the most-productive player in franchise history. Hall of Fame receiver Steve Largent caught 158 passes for 2,516 yards and 22 touchdowns in his first three years (1976-78). Galloway's three-season numbers: 196 for 3,075 and 26. Heady stuff for a player who is best known for his speed.

Galloway also has something else Largent never had: a strong supporting cast. James McKnight is coming off a breakthrough season. Mike Pritchard had a rebirth in '97 after catching just 73 the previous three seasons combined (64 catches for 843 yards last season). Brian Blades is still dependable if not as durable after 10 seasons of making the tough catch over the middle. Carlester Crumpler caught more passes last year (31) than any Seahawks tight end since Charle Young in 1984.

LINE—Another year, another rebuilding job. For the 10th consecutive season, the Seahawks are shuffling their line. But this time, it appears the changes are upgrades.

Glover, the NFC Pro Bowl starter the past three seasons with the Lions, was signed after center Kevin Mawae jumped to the Jets in free agency. Habib then was coaxed from the Broncos to fill the right guard spot, where three players started last year because of injuries and ineffectiveness. Ballard and his arthritic right knee return for an 11th season at right tackle. The left side of the line was solidified by first-round draft choices in 1996 (guard Pete Kendall) and '97 (Jones, the athletic and agile tackle who protects Moon's blindside).

The draft tackle Todd Weiner, a second-round pick from Kansas State) and free agency (guard Chris Gray, who arrives from the Dolphins) delivered needed depth. Frank Beede and Grant Williams, who made the team as undrafted free agents two years ago, started 14 games between them last year because of injuries to Jones, Ballard and Derrick Graham, who was not re-signed. But neither Beede nor Williams matched the progress they displayed during their rookie seasons, and Moon took a beating during the two games when injuries forced both to start on the right side at the same time.

DEFENSE

LINE—This unit starts with a potentially dominating three-tackle rotation that looks to force double-team blocking.

Kennedy has returned from a broken leg that forced him to miss the final six games last year and rededicated himself to being the player who was

Seattle Seahawks

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
16	Arellanes, Jim	6-3/217	1-30-74	1	Fresno State	FA/97	0/0
17	Friesz, John	6-4/223	5-19-67	9	Idaho	FA/95	2/1
7	Kitna, Jon	6-2/217	9-21-72	2	Central Washington	FA/96	3/1
1	Moon, Warren	6-3/213	11-18-56	15	Washington	FA/97	15/14

Running Backs

31	Broussard, Steve	5-7/201	2-22-67	9	Washington State	FA/95	16/1
34	Brown, Reggie (FB)	6-0/244	6-26-73	3	Fresno State	D3b/96	11/0
35	Gray, Oscar (FB)	6-1/255	8-7-72	2	Arkansas	FA/96	0/0
30	Green, Ahman	6-0/213	2-16-77	R	Nebraska	D3/98	—
38	Strong, Mack (FB)	6-0/235	9-11-71	5	Georgia	FA/93	16/10
32	Watters, Ricky	6-1/217	4-7-69	8	Notre Dame	FA/98	16/16*

Receivers

89	Blades, Brian	5-11/190	7-24-65	11	Miami (Fla.)	D2/88	11/3
87	Crumpler, Carlester (TE)	6-6/260	9-5-71	5	East Carolina	D7/94	15/12
83	Davis, Tyree	5-9/175	9-23-70	3	Central Arkansas	FA/97	13/1
86	Fauria, Christian (TE)	6-4/245	9-22-71	4	Colorado	D2/95	16/3
84	Galloway, Joey	5-11/188	11-20-71	4	Ohio State	D1/95	15/15
81	Harris, Ronnie	5-11/179	6-4-70	5	Oregon	FA/94	13/0
88	May, Deems (TE)	6-4/263	3-6-69	7	North Carolina	FA/97	16/0
82	McKnight, James	6-1/198	6-17-72	4	Liberty	FA/94	12/5
49	Mili, Itula (TE)	6-4/265	4-20-73	2	Brigham Young	D6/97	0/0
85	Pritchard, Mike	5-10/193	10-26-69	8	Colorado	FA/96	16/15
18	Shaw, Bobby	6-0/186	4-23-75	R	California	D6b/98	—
19	Wilson, Robert	5-11/176	6-23-74	1	Florida A & M	FA/97	0/0

Offensive Linemen

75	Ballard, Howard (T)	6-6/325	11-3-63	11	Alabama A&M	FA/94	10/10
63	Beede, Frank (G)	6-4/296	5-1-73	3	Panhandle State (Okla.)	FA/96	16/6
60	Bloedorn, Greg (G)	6-6/278	11-15-72	2	Cornell	FA/96	3/0
53	Glover, Kevin (C)	6-2/282	6-17-63	14	Maryland	FA/98	16/16*
62	Gray, Chris (G)	6-4/305	6-19-70	6	Auburn	FA/98	8/2*
68	Greene, Andrew (G)	6-3/304	9-24-69	2	Indiana	FA/97	0/0
68	Habib, Brian (G)	6-7/299	12-2-64	10	Washington	FA/98	14/14*
71	Jones, Walter (T)	6-5/300	1-19-74	2	Florida State	D1b/97	12/12
66	Kendall, Pete (G)	6-5/292	7-9-73	3	Boston College	D1/96	16/16
52	McEndoo, Jason (G)	6-5/315	2-25-75	R	Washington State	D7/98	—
74	Weiner, Todd (T)	6-4/300	9-16-75	R	Kansas State	D2/98	—
69	Williams, Grant (T)	6-7/323	5-10-74	3	Louisiana Tech	FA/96	16/8
65	Williams, Tashe (T)	6-4/300	9-23-72	1	Northern Colorado	FA/97	0/0

Defensive Linemen

98	Adams, Sam (T)	6-3/300	6-13-73	5	Texas A&M	D1/94	16/16
93	Daniels, Phillip (E)	6-5/263	3-4-73	3	Georgia	D4a/96	13/10
91	Hansen, Carl (E)	6-5/282	1-25-76	R	Stanford	D6a/98	—
96	Kennedy, Cortez (T)	6-3/306	8-23-68	9	Miami (Fla.)	D1/90	8/8
99	LaBounty, Matt (E)	6-4/275	1-3-69	6	Oregon	T-GB/96	15/6
76	Parker, Riddick (T)	6-3/274	11-20-72	2	North Carolina	FA/96	11/0
97	Saleaumua, Dan (T)	6-0/315	11-25-64	12	Arizona State	FA/97	16/8
70	Sinclair, Michael (E)	6-4/267	1-31-68	8	Eastern New Mexico	D6/91	16/16

Linebackers

54	Barber, Michael	6-1/246	11-9-71	4	Auburn	FA/95	8/2
94	Brown, Chad	6-2/240	7-12-70	6	Colorado	FA/97	15/15
59	Cain, Joe	6-1/242	6-11-65	10	Oregon Tech	FA/97	12/0
54	Hardy, Darryl	6-2/230	11-22-68	3	Tennessee	W-Dal/97	16/0
57	Kyle, Jason	6-3/242	5-12-72	4	Arizona State	D4b/95	0/0
56	Logan, James	6-2/225	12-6-72	4	Memphis	W-Cin/95	14/1
50	Myles, DeShone	6-2/235	10-31-74	R	Nevada	D4/98	—
51	Simmons, Anthony	6-0/230	6-20-76	R	Clemson	D1/98	—
55	Smith, Darrin	6-1/230	4-15-70	6	Miami, Fla	FA/98	7/7*
95	Wells, Dean	6-3/248	7-20-70	6	Kentucky	D4/93	16/16

Defensive Backs

20	Bellamy, Jay (S)	5-11/199	7-8-72	5	Rutgers	FA/94	16/7
36	Blades, Bennie (S)	6-1/221	9-3-66	11	Miami (Fla.)	FA/97	10/9
28	Burton, James (CB)	5-9/184	4-27-71	5	Fresno State	FA/98	5/1*
25	Collins, Mark (S)	5-10/196	1-16-64	13	Cal State Fullerton	FA/98	1/0*
21	Cunningham, T.J. (S)	6-0/197	10-24-72	2	Colorado	D6b/96	0/0
21	Rusk, Reggie (CB)	5-10/190	10-19-72	2	Kentucky	PS-TB/97	4/0
24	Springs, Shawn (CB)	6-0/195	3-11-75	2	Ohio State	D1a/97	10/10
37	Stokes, Eric (S)	5-11/201	12-18-73	2	Nebraska	D5/97	7/0
22	Thomas, Fred (CB)	5-9/172	9-11-73	3	UT-Martin	D2/96	16/3
33	Williams, Darryl (S)	6-0/202	1-8-70	7	Miami (Fla.)	FA/96	16/16
27	Williams, Willie (CB)	5-9/180	12-26-70	6	Western Carolina	FA/97	16/16

Specialists

10	Feagles, Jeff (P)	6-1/207	3-7-66	11	Miami (Fla.)	FA/98	16/0*
2	Peterson, Todd (K)	5-10/171	2-4-70	4	Georgia	FA/95	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Michael Black, RB; Chris Brown, G; Ben Crosland, DE; Joey Eloms, CB; Brian Finneran, WR; Curtis Galick, S; Furrell Hankton, TE; Stuart Hanson, DE; Chris Jackson, WR; Stanley Jackson, WR; Vershan Jackson, FB; Dirk Johnson, P; Carlos Jones, CB; Reggie Lowe, DE; Wade Richey, K; Mark Rommel, OT; Jason Sadler, OT; Paul Spicer, DE.

*—Not with Seahawks in 1997.

Seahawks

Seattle OFFENSE

Watters Green RB

Strong R. Brown FB

(QB) Moon Friesz
(C) Glover McEndoo

Habib Gray RG

Ballard Weiner RT

Crumpler Fauria TE

Pritchard McKnight WR

Galloway Blades WR

Jones G. Williams LT

Kendall Beede LG

QB C

RG

RT

LE

CB

Springs Rusk

Daniels LaBounty RE

Kennedy Hansen RT

Adams Saleaumua LT

Sinclair Hansen LE

W. Williams Thomas CB

Smith Logan

D. Williams Collins FB

Wells Simmons MLB

Bellamy Stokes SS

C. Brown Myles LLB

Seattle DEFENSE

Probable starters listed on top

K: Peterson
P: Feagles
KR: Broussard, Green
PR: Galloway, Harris

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Mark Collins, S (FA/Packers); Jeff Feagles, P (FA/Cardinals); Kevin Glover, C (FA/Lions); Chris Gray, G (FA/Bears); Brian Habib, G (FA/Broncos); Darrin Smith, LB (FA/Eagles); Ricky Watters, RB (FA/Eagles).

Key losses: Kevin Mawae, C (FA/Jets); Winston Moss, LB (retired); Lamar Smith, RB (FA/Saints); Rick Tuten, P (FA/Rams); Chris Warren, RB (released/Cowboys).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Anthony Simmons	LB	Clemson
2nd	Todd Weiner	T	Kansas State
3rd	Ahman Green	RB	Nebraska
4th	DeShone Myles	LB	Nevada
6th	Carl Hansen	DE	Stanford
6th	Bobby Shaw	WR	California
7th	Jason McEndoo	C	Washington State

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	QB Rick Mirer	Reserve with Bears
1994	DT Sam Adams	Starter with Seahawks
1995	WR Joey Galloway	Starter with Seahawks
1996	G Pete Kendall	Starter with Seahawks
1997	CB Shawn Springs	Starter with Seahawks
	T Walter Jones	Starter with Seahawks

Coaching Staff

Coach: Dennis Erickson. **Offensive staff:** Bob Bratkowski (offensive coordinator/wide receivers) • Keith Gilbertson (tight ends) • Milt Jackson (wide receivers) • Howard Mudd (offensive line) • Rich Olson (quarterbacks) • Gregg Smith (assis-

tant head coach/offensive line). **Defensive staff:** Tommy Brasher (defensive line) • Dave Brown (defensive assistant) • Greg McMackin (defensive coordinator) • Mike Murphy (linebackers) • Willy Robinson (defensive backs). **Others:** Dave Arnold (special teams) • Darren Krein (assistant strength and conditioning) • Dana LeDuc (strength and conditioning) • Pete Rodriguez (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 8-8 (3rd in AFC West); 4-4 in division; 6-6 in conference; 4-4 at home; 4-4 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Erickson's regular-season record: 23-25 in three seasons with the Seahawks.

Erickson's postseason record: None.

Team record past five years: 35-45 (.438, ranks 18th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1988.

1997 team rankings:	No.	AFC	NFL
Total offense	*359.9	2	3
Rushing offense	*112.5	6	13
Passing offense	*247.4	1	1
Scoring offense	365	6	9
Total defense	*303.1	3	8
Rushing defense	*108.2	7	12
Passing defense	*194.9	4	14
Scoring defense	362	10	22
Takeaways	29	T6	T13
Giveaways	32	T11	T20
Turnover differential	-3	T11	T19
Sacks	42	T7	T15
Sacks allowed	36	7	12

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

The Seahawks were one of just four teams to finish in the top 10 last season in both offense and defense. But they were the only team in that group not to advance to postseason play:

Team	Off. rank	Def. rank	Season's end
Denver	1st	5th	Super Bowl champ
Green Bay	4	7	Super Bowl runner-up
Pittsburgh	6	6	AFC runner-up
Seattle	3	8	Out of playoffs

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Philadelphia	1:01
Sept. 13	ARIZONA	1:15
Sept. 20	WASHINGTON	1:05
Sept. 27	at Pittsburgh	4:05
Oct. 4	at Kansas City	7:20
Oct. 11	DENVER	1:15
Oct. 18	Open date	
Oct. 25	at San Diego	1:15
Nov. 1	OAKLAND	5:20
Nov. 8	KANSAS CITY	1:15
Nov. 15	at Oakland	1:05
Nov. 22	at Dallas	12:01
Nov. 29	TENNESSEE	1:05
Dec. 6	at N.Y. Jets	1:01
Dec. 13	SAN DIEGO	1:05
Dec. 20	INDIANAPOLIS	1:05
Dec. 27	at Denver	2:15

Strength of schedule: T23rd.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	N.Y. JETS	L	3-41
Sept. 7	DENVER	L	14-35
Sept. 14	at Indianapolis	W	31-3
Sept. 21	SAN DIEGO	W	26-22
Sept. 28	at Kansas City (OT)	L	17-20
Oct. 5	TENNESSEE	W	16-13
Oct. 12	Open date		
Oct. 19	at St. Louis	W	17-9
Oct. 26	OAKLAND	W	45-34
Nov. 2	at Denver	L	27-30
Nov. 9	at San Diego	W	37-31
Nov. 16	at New Orleans (OT)	L	17-20
Nov. 23	KANSAS CITY	L	14-19
Nov. 30	ATLANTA	L	17-24
Dec. 7	at Baltimore	L	24-31
Dec. 14	at Oakland	W	22-21
Dec. 21	SAN FRANCISCO	W	38-9

Miscellaneous

Owner: Ken Behring.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Kingdome (66,400, artificial).

Ticket information: 206-682-2800.

Flagship radio station: KIRO-AM, 710.

Training site: Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Wash.; 206-827-9777.



After three mostly uninspired seasons, Adams burst onto the scene with a performance that almost helped him go to the Pro Bowl.

voted to six consecutive Pro Bowls. Sam Adams emerged last year from three seasons of unfilled potential to be a first alternate to the Pro Bowl. And Saleaumua is a former Pro Bowl performer with the Chiefs.

Flanking this trio are Sinclair, a left end who has been voted to the Pro Bowl the past two seasons while collecting 25 sacks, and Phillip Daniels, who has added 25 pounds after playing last year at 260.

Depth remains a problem. Last year, versatile Matt LaBounty was used at end and as a pass-rushing tackle after injuries sidelined Daniels and Kennedy. The addition of Carl Hansen, a sixth-round pick from Stanford, will help.

LINEBACKERS—This should be the most improved unit on the club; it also was the unit that needed the most help.

Brown remains the focal point after leading the team in tackles and returning two fumbles for touchdowns in his first season with the Seahawks. This year, Brown will shift from the right side to the left in the 4-3 scheme and continue to be a pass-rushing end in the nickel.

Smith, who starred in this scheme while playing for Erickson at the University of Miami, was signed in free agency from the Eagles to add speed opposite Brown. Smith's arrival also eases the loss of Moss, the defensive captain who retired after fracturing a vertebra in his neck last December and has joined the coaching staff.

The draft supplied speed and depth in first-round pick Anthony Simmons, a tackling machine from Clemson who will battle incumbent Dean Wells for the starting job in the middle, and fourth-rounder DeShone Myles, a product of Nevada whose speed should pay immediate dividends on special teams.

SECONDARY—The secondary received primary attention last year, when Willie Williams and Bennie Blades were signed in free agency and Springs was drafted in the first round. They joined free safety Darryl Williams, a free-agent addition the year before.

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	C	Defensive line:	B
Offensive backfield:	B+	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	C+	Secondary:	B-
Receivers:	B	Special teams:	C

Willie Williams and Springs are the best cornerback tandem in franchise history and their presence helped Darryl Williams share the AFC lead with eight interceptions while being voted to his first Pro Bowl.

Blades missed six of the final seven games last year with three bulging discs in his lower back and might not be able to play this season. Jay Bellamy performed well while subbing for Blades last year. The Seahawks also signed Mark Collins, whose versatility and savvy will help in the nickel.

Fred Thomas was erratic last year while playing in the nickel and starting for Springs, who missed six games with a fractured thumb. But he still is the team's best backup corner.

The Seahawks are going to ask their corners to play more press coverage this season, so Springs and Willie Williams must stay healthy.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Little went right last season.

There were missed field goals in two overtimes losses. There was a dropped punt snap that set up a touchdown. There was a blocked punt for a safety. There were missed tackles and blown assignments that allowed kickoff and punt returns for a combined three scores. There were two fumbles returned for touchdowns. There was a minus-6 yard punt.

That's why these units have a new coach (Rodriguez); a new punter and holder (Feagles, a free agent from the Cardinals); a new kickoff returner (Green) to team with Broussard; a new deep snapper (Jason McEndoo, a seventh-round pick from Washington State); and the possibility of a new punt returner, with Springs and Galloway challenging incumbent Ronnie Harris.

In addition, one of the major offseason projects was trying to rebuild the confidence of Todd Peterson, an 82-percent kicker in his first two seasons with the club who missed a couple of game-winners in overtime losses last year.

The speed added in free agency and the draft also should help coverage units that last year allowed averages of 12.2 yards on punts, highest in the AFC, and 23.1 yards on kickoffs, among the bottom 10 in the league.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The Seahawks' season could come down to six consecutive games against AFC West foes in October and November. The Seahawks are 19-45 against the AFC West since 1990, including 9-15 in three seasons under Erickson, with a combined 10 consecutive losses to the Chiefs and Broncos. That's why the stretch of games against the Chiefs (twice), Broncos, Chargers and Raiders (twice) will be vital to any hopes the Seahawks have of producing a 10-win season for the first time since 1986.

The Seahawks will be road-tested and trench-toughened by the time they hit this important six-game stretch, as they open the season with three consecutive NFC East opponents and follow with a game at Pittsburgh.

BOTTOM LINE

Erickson has spent the past four offseasons stocking the roster with the type of personnel needed to play his style of offense and defense. The Seahawks are a much different, and vastly better, team than the one Erickson inherited. Now, the players must prove it. The Seahawks can make the playoffs for the first time since 1988, and probably must for Erickson's sake, by winning nine or 10 games.

TSN

Clare Farnsworth covers the Seahawks for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

SCOUTING THE NFC

49ers' 'try harder' philosophy should work if they keep their focus on the field

BY DAN POMPEI

The 49ers were the Avis of NFC teams last season. That is, clearly No. 2. So how good should they be this season after having added, among others, the best receiver in the NFL, a starting defensive end they signed away from the Packers and arguably the best middle linebacker in the NFC?

Sure, the 49ers lost NFC defensive player of the year Dana Stubblefield, and they'll miss the big tackle's presence in the middle. But the additions of former Packers defensive end Gabe Wilkins—assuming he is fully recovered from a knee injury—and former Saints middle linebacker Winfred Tubbs should more than make up for the loss of Stubblefield. A healthy Bryant Young also could help offset the loss of Stubblefield. Young, San Francisco's other defensive tackle, was hindered most of the second half of the season—he missed four games—by a high-ankle sprain and a foot injury.

And if it takes the 49ers a little longer to get to the passer, they hope newly acquired cornerbacks Antonio Langham, a free-agent signing, and R.W. McQuarters, their first-round pick, can compensate by sticking with receivers better than Rod Woodson and Tyronne Drakeford did last season.

Even if the 49ers were to regress on defense a bit, they might be able to get away with it. They had the top-ranked defense in the NFL in '97. And their offense should be considerably better as long as the great Jerry Rice can catch balls and run with them the way he did before injuring his knee in the first game of the season.

Terrell Owens and J.J. Stokes took steps toward establishing themselves in Rice's absence, so quarterback Steve Young, who remains on top of his game, should have some options when he drops back. Young won't miss retired Brent Jones as long as newly acquired tight end Irv Smith plays to his capabilities and second-year tight end Greg Clark continues to develop.

The 49ers should improve their 18th-ranked passing attack, but it may have to come at the expense of their running game. Free-agent fullback William Floyd, who signed with Carolina,



Stokes had probably his best season as a pro last season. With the return of a healthy Jerry Rice, the 49ers' passing attack should again be potent.

will be missed as much for his lightning rod leadership as his high-impact blocks.

The 49ers also should be a better team as a result of continuity. This is the second year of coach Steve Mariucci's program. Now that Mariucci has established himself, the challenge could be to keep the 49ers focused on the field. Ownership, management and stadium issues threaten to distract players as Eddie DeBartolo Jr. sorts out his legal problems.

NFC EAST

Player to watch: Arizona QB Jake Plummer. With a year of experience, Plummer should be ready to blossom. As a rookie last season, he was one of the most exciting passers in the league. He has excellent receivers in Rob Moore and Frank Sanders, and he should benefit from the presence of running back Adrian Murrell and new offensive coordinator Marc Trestman.

NOTES: The Redskins fizzled after a promising start last season, but it might have been different if

quarterback **Gus Frerotte** had been healthy. Now that the Redskins have upgraded their defensive line by signing free agent **Dana Stubblefield** and trading for **Dan Wilkinson**, they could be ready to fulfill some of the promise they've been showing. ... The Cowboys are starting over with a new coach, **Chan Gailey**, but essentially the same cast of characters. Their weaknesses last year figure to be their weaknesses this year: an aging offensive line, a subpar defensive line and no complementary

receiver to go with **Michael Irvin**. But you can't discount a team that has won three Super Bowls in the '90s, particularly if Gailey can reintroduce discipline in Big D. ... The Cardinals had the look of a team on the rise last season, and their offseason maneuvering did nothing to dispel that appearance. With brash **Jake Plummer** set at quarterback, the Cardinals passed on **Ryan Leaf** and picked defensive end **Andre Wadsworth**, arguably the best player in the draft. They also drafted defensive back **Corey**

Chavous and added receiver/kick returner **Eric Metcalf** and running back **Adrian Murrell** in trades. ... The question for the Giants isn't whether they overcome the other teams in the NFC East to repeat as division winners; instead, the question is whether they can overcome their own offense. The Giants ranked 27th overall and 28th in passing in '97, but they are planning on the return of receiver **Ike Hilliard**, who missed most of his rookie season with a neck injury, and improvement from quarterback **Danny Kanell**. Last year, the Giants coached around Kanell's weaknesses. This year, Kanell will have to win some games. ... The Eagles lost running back **Ricky Watters**, quarterback **Ty Detmer** and offensive coordinator **Jon Gruden**, then struck out with the big names in the free-agent market. They're hoping **Charlie Garner** and **Duce Staley** can carry the running game and **Bobby Hoying** can carry the passing game. That's counting on three players who haven't done it before. The Eagles were able to pick up two players in trades who should help quite a bit—defensive end **Hugh Douglas** and receiver **Jeff Graham**.

NFC CENTRAL

Player to watch: Chicago DE Alonzo Spellman. He missed most of last season with a shoulder injury, then was put on the trading block. He responded with a well-publicized threat to kill himself. After being hospitalized, he was found walking on the side of a road with no shirt or shoes in the middle of winter. The Bears are hoping Spellman solves his personal problems and gets ready to play football. They need him badly, as they have a gaping hole at end.

NOTES: What stood between the Buccaneers and the Packers a year ago may have been the Bucs' inability to throw the ball with consistency. So, Tampa Bay added wide receivers **Bert Emanuel** (free agency) and **Jacquez Green** (draft), and is counting on improvement from second-year receiver **Reidel Anthony** and still-developing quarterback **Trent Dilfer**. ... On Green Bay's way to a dynasty, something funny happened in Titletown. First, the heavily favored Packers lost the Super Bowl. Then, it became apparent coach **Mike Holmgren** might not be around much longer. The Packers agreed to let Holmgren speak with other teams that may be interested in giving him a dual role of coach/general manager after this season. Finally, it became clear that defensive end **Reggie White**, whose leadership and strength were cornerstones of the Pack's rise, is close to retiring. ... The Vikings' major offseason accomplishment was keeping the team intact. Late last season, receiver **Jake Reed**, running back **Robert Smith**, offensive tackle **Todd Steussie** and defensive tackle **John Randle** were free agents-to-be. Now, they're all back with the Vikings. They will be joined by the most controversial of draft picks, receiver **Randy Moss**. ... After the neck injury to outside linebacker **Reggie Brown**, the Lions had to start over at the position. So they signed **Allen Aldridge** as a free agent and traded for **Rob Fredrickson**. Now everyone is wondering if they'll be starting over at quarterback, where **Scott Mitchell** has failed to deliver in the playoffs and rookie **Charlie Batch** is wait-

ing. ... The Bears are hoping running back **Curtis Enis**, center **Olin Kreutz** and tight end **Alonzo Mayes** can pump some life into their sagging offense. But they'll need more than those three rookies. A consistent performance by quarterback **Erik Kramer** and a healthy season from receiver **Curtis Conway** could go a long way toward making the Bears respectable.

NFC WEST

Player to watch: New Orleans RB Lamar Smith. After leaving the Seahawks and the shadow of Chris Warren, Smith could be ready for a breakout season. He's also hoping to put behind him a 1994 auto accident that left former teammate Mike Frier paralyzed; Smith was driving under the influence and spent part of this offseason in jail as a result of the accident. In New Orleans, he will have plenty of opportunities to run the ball, as coach Mike Ditka hopes Smith can be his new Walter Payton.

NOTES: The 49ers' offensive line will get its yearly overhaul, with **Derrick Deese** moving over to replace retiring right tackle **Kirk Scrafford** and **Jamie Brown**, who was acquired in a trade with the Broncos, replacing Deese at left tackle. The 49ers wanted to draft an offensive tackle in the first round in the worst way, but the players they liked were gone before their turn came up. Subsequently, they selected linemen in three of the next four rounds. ... Controversy was no stranger in Charlotte this offseason. The Panthers allowed general manager **Bill Polian** to leave for the Colts and offensive coordinator **Joe Pendry** to leave for the Bills. They decided to allow quarterback **Kerry Collins** to become a free agent after this season. The Panthers brought back linebacker **Kevin Greene**, who had left the year before with some hard feelings. Then there were the free-agent signings of Packers cornerback **Doug Evans** and Redskins defensive lineman **Sean Gilbert**, both of whom were paid more than a lot of teams thought they were worth. ... In search of an upgraded pass rush, the Rams let aging **Leslie O'Neal** go and replaced him with first-round pick **Grant Wistrom**. They also brought in free-agent defensive tackle **Joe Phillips** from the Chiefs. Quarterback **Tony Banks** and the running game are big questions on offense. ... Buoyed by a surprisingly effective defensive line and a resurgent **Chris Chandler** at quarterback, the Falcons won six of their last eight games last season. For the upswing to continue, they'll have to keep Chandler healthy—no small feat—and find a way to compensate for the loss of leading receiver **Bert Emanuel**. ... The Saints are counting on running back **Lamar Smith**, rookie offensive tackle **Kyle Turley** and receiver **Sean Dawkins** to improve their offense, which ranked last in the league in '97. The Saints made a stab at trading up in the draft to acquire **Peyton Manning** or **Ryan Leaf**, but they appear to be stuck with **Billy Joe Hobert** at quarterback. **TSN**

Senior writer **Dan Pompei** covers the NFL for THE SPORTING NEWS.

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

CHOSEN BY TSN EDITORS AND WRITERS

EAST	CENTRAL	WEST
1. Washington	1. Green Bay	1. San Francisco
2. New York	2. Tampa Bay	2. Carolina
3. Dallas	3. Minnesota	3. New Orleans
4. Arizona	4. Detroit	4. Atlanta
5. Philadelphia	5. Chicago	5. St. Louis

NFC CHAMPION: San Francisco.

ALL-NFC TEAM

OFFENSE

WR: Herman Moore, Detroit.
WR: Rob Moore, Arizona.
TE: Mark Chmura, Green Bay.
T: Paul Gruber, Tampa Bay.
T: Todd Steussie, Minnesota.
G: Jeff Hartings, Detroit.
G: Randall McDaniel, Minnesota.
C: Frank Winters, Green Bay.
QB: Brett Favre, Green Bay.
RB: Barry Sanders, Detroit.
FB: Mike Alstott, Tampa.

DEFENSE

E: Robert Porcher, Detroit.
T: John Randle, Minnesota.
T: Bryant Young, San Francisco.
E: Chuck Smith, Atlanta.
OLB: Jessie Armstead, Giants.
ILB: Winfred Tubbs, San Francisco.
OLB: Ken Harvey, Washington.
CB: Deion Sanders, Dallas.
CB: Aeneas Williams, Arizona.
S: LeRoy Butler, Green Bay.
S: John Lynch, Tampa.
SPECIAL TEAMS
K: Jason Hanson, Detroit.
P: Dan Stryzinski, Atlanta.
KR: Michael Bates, Carolina.

GOING DEEP

Best coach: Mike Holmgren, Green Bay.
Best coaching staff: Green Bay.
Best front office: Green Bay.
Worst front office: Philadelphia.
Best home-field advantage: Green Bay.
Best offensive backfield: Green Bay.
Best receivers: Minnesota.
Best offensive line: Minnesota.
Best defensive line: Arizona.
Best linebackers: San Francisco.
Best secondary: Dallas.
Most overrated player: Sean Gilbert, DT, Carolina.
Most underrated player: Roman Phifer, LB, St. Louis.
Best short-yardage runner: Mike Alstott, Tampa Bay.
Best blocking back: William Henderson, Green Bay.
Best receiver out of the backfield: Amp Lee, St. Louis.
Most fearless receiver: Cris Carter, Minnesota.
Best blocking tight end: Howard Cross, New York.
Hardest hitter: John Lynch, SS, Tampa Bay.
Best special teams kamikaze: Jim Schwantz, LB, San Francisco.
Best pooch punter: Ken Walter, Carolina.

Being accepted as a player—a legitimate NFL player—was all that mattered to Dexter Coakley.

He had heard all the jokes and all the comparisons and all the qualifiers that shadow short people. And by NFL standards, Coakley—who set the NCAA career record for tackles (an unofficial statistic) with 616 at Division I-AA Appalachian State—was considered darn short at 5-9½, as well as a tad ambitious to believe he could enjoy a lengthy career at linebacker.

"Look at (Atlanta's Jessie) Tuggle or (former NFL stand-out Sam) Mills, and there always is going to be questions about, 'Is he big enough to play at this level,' " says Dallas defensive line coach Jim Bates, who was the team's linebackers coach last season. "But those guys, and Dexter, too, have special qualities to overcome the size factor. Now it's a rarity, but they have skill levels above the norm."

Coakley earned the starting weakside linebacker spot last season from the get-go and excelled—making one all-rookie team, being named NFC Defensive Player of the Month in October and causing Bates to gush over his future, calling him a future All-Pro. Coakley answered two big questions for the Cowboys, who gambled by using a third-round pick on him. First, he was not too short to play, finishing third on the team with 136 tackles, including a team-high 10 for losses. And second, the Cowboys don't have to worry about how to replace former weakside starter Darrin Smith, who left as a free agent after the '96 season. Coakley is their present and future at weakside linebacker.

"Coming in, I knew a lot was expected of me, and I wanted to go out and excel and win the players' respect," Coakley says. "The players started accepting me as a player, and not so much as an undersized linebacker. Early on in camp, I started opening some eyes. Everyone started to realize, 'Hey, you know, despite his size, this kid can play,' and so I think I earned the respect of the players and coaching staff in camp."

Even so, the dreaded rookie paranoia overwhelmed Coakley one afternoon in his training-camp dorm room when Bates called, saying he wanted to see Coakley downstairs immediately.

"My heart started pounding," Coakley says, "because I didn't know what was going on. It was like, 'Oh no, I got cut.' So I asked Coach Bates, 'What's the problem?' He said to come downstairs, and he had this really soft tone, like death was there—like the Grim Reaper or something."

Instead, Bates was the bearer of good tidings, telling Coakley that competition for the weakside spot had ceased and the starting job was his.

Coakley is 215 pounds, has the speed and quickness of a running back and, most of all, understands leverage, striking the blow of a man much heavier. "He's not afraid to take it up in the hole and take on guys 100 pounds heavier than he is," Dallas All-Pro safety Darren Woodson says. "He'll get after you, and is smart. A smart player."

And though he has played just one season, Coakley has admirers around the league, including Carolina coach Dom Capers, known as a defensive guru. "I've been coaching defense my whole career, and there are certain guys that jump out at you," Capers said in December. "He's one of those guys that just gets your attention and you say, 'This guy's going to be a football player.'"

But as well as Coakley performed last season, expectations are higher for the '98 season. "I expect bigger and better things from him this year, and I've told him that," Woodson says.

After all, Coakley has a year under his belt, knows just how fast and intense NFL football really is and understands better how to survive as a little man in a big man's game.

"I think this upcoming season you'll see more of a tenacious, more instinctive, more aware player out there," Coakley says. "Last year, I was more or less playing within the realm of the defense saying, 'I can't make mistakes.'"

"Sometimes I was hesitant to go make a play I was sure I was capable of making. So now I think you're going to see a more aggressive approach to the game. When I see an opening, I'm going to shoot it and try and make that play because I'm capable of getting that done. I'm not going to be considered a rookie anymore. I'm going to be considered a player."

Which is all he ever wanted.

TSN

Mickey Spagnola is a writer based in Dallas.

SPEED

BUILDING ON ROOKIE SUCCESS

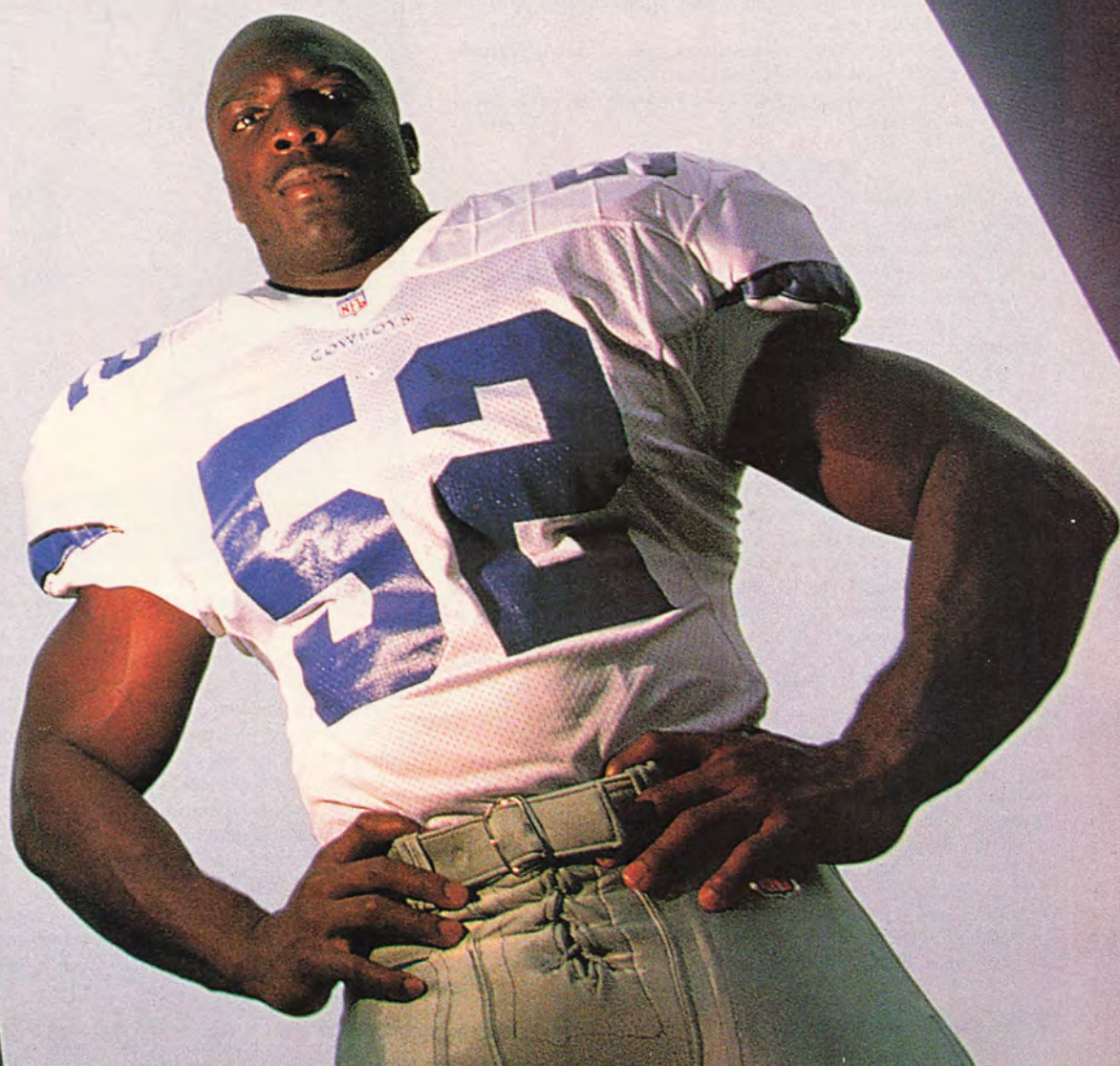
Chapter 2

THRILLS

***Dallas' Dexter Coakley proves
size doesn't always matter***

STORY BY MICKEY SPAGNOLA

PHOTO BY ROBERT SEALE / TSN





New-look Cardinals are hoping to capitalize on offseason successes

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 4th

BY LEE SHAPPELL

Some day, possibly yet in this millennium, the Cardinals are going to win. During their decade in the desert, they've been through four coaches and three personnel chiefs and still haven't figured it out.

Until, perhaps, now. Optimism, which in these parts means something beyond 8-8, has never been higher. Two lucrative trades and a draft regarded as one of the best in the league will do that for a team. But how does a 4-12 outfit suddenly acquire the Midas touch?

It seems the Cardinals finally have a competent personnel czar in Bob Ferguson, who helped build Denver and Buffalo into Super Bowl contenders. And they appear to have a playmaking quarterback in Jake Plummer, whose performance as a rookie last season convinced Ferguson and Co. they could pass on Ryan Leaf.

Instead, Ferguson traded the No. 2 overall pick to San Diego for picks that became defensive end Andre Wadsworth and defensive back Corey Chavous, plus return specialist Eric Metcalf, linebacker Patrick Sapp and the Chargers' 1999 first-round pick. On a roll, Ferguson then traded a third-round pick to the Jets for two-time 1,000-yard rusher Adrian Murrell plus a seventh-round pick, which became promising defensive end Jomo Cousins.

Then, the Cardinals hired offensive coordinator Marc Trestman to work with Plummer and run the West Coast offense.

Yes, the Cardinals have improved, but a 4-12 team doesn't fix everything in one offseason.

COACHING

Mr. Beige, as Vince Tobin has come to be known—for his game-day pants as well as his public persona—faces a make-or-break season.

Phoenix seemed to be in love with him after the Cardinals won four of their final seven games in 1996. Of course, following Buddy Ryan would make it easy for anyone to be a hero.

But then Tobin hired Dick Jamieson as offensive coordinator. It was a disastrous move. The Cardinals finished last in the league in rushing and sacks allowed in 1997. Even worse, they frequently appeared confused and disorganized.

Tobin's credibility took a direct hit. He was ordered to fire Jamieson, which he did, but he seemingly landed on his feet with the hiring of Trestman, who is right off the West Coast offense family tree.

Trestman has a new quarterback coach in Geep Chryst, a bright, young offensive mind who coached the Cardinals' tight ends for two seasons. Former Rams assistant George Warhop is the new line coach, and veteran NFL assistant Hank Kuhlmann gets the tight ends.

The defensive staff returns intact, including Hall of Famer Joe Greene, who this season may be coaching a line that rivals the one he played on with those great Steelers teams.

Tobin is at a crossroads. Win and people will forget Jamieson. Lose and Tobin could join his former offensive coordinator in the unemployment line.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Plummer's rookie statistics compare favorably with the first-year numbers of some of the league's all-time greats, but it may be a bit premature to call him the next Joe Montana.

Still, there's no denying that Plummer, who played in 10 games and started the final nine after Kent Graham was injured, makes things happen. Teammates and fans can feel it. He has the instincts and scrambling ability to make something out of nothing. And, for a skinny guy, he throws on a rope.

In his fourth start, Plummer passed for an NFL rookie-record 388



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

After years of solid but not spectacular play, Moore emerged last season as the league's leader in receiving yardage with 1,584.

yards. He tied another rookie record with four touchdown passes against Washington in December. His 7.44 yards per attempt ranked sixth in the league, ahead of such luminaries as John Elway, Dan Marino and Drew Bledsoe. In his 10 appearances, Plummer set Cardinals rookie records for yards (2,203) and touchdowns (15). And with a year of learning reads and now working under the direction of Trestman, Plummer should be even better.

Former Giant Dave Brown, signed as a free agent, and Stoney Case, who has played all of six quarters in three years with the Cardinals, will fight for the No. 2 spot. Brown's starting experience in the NFC East should give him the edge.

RUNNING BACKS—Leeland McElroy is going to need that degree from Texas A&M to fall back on. The starter last year in an offense that rushed for a league-low 78 yards a game, McElroy will be no better

than No. 3 this time around. The Cardinals traded for Murrell, who will start, signed free agent Mario Bates and drafted Michael Pittman of Fresno State. As a result, one of the weakest positions on the team appears to have become one of the strongest.

Murrell, who brings the experience of a 1,000-yard rusher, looks to be a perfect fit for Trestman's offense. He's a slasher who is fast enough to get around the corner and big enough to run inside. He also can catch, a must for a West Coast back.

Bates has all-around talent but has yet to put it all together. In four seasons with the Saints, he averaged just 3.8 yards per carry. The Cardinals are hoping that coming home—Bates grew up about 90 minutes away in Tucson and played at Arizona State—will help bring out that potential. Pittman, a fourth-round pick, is a powerful runner who can catch.

Larry Centers, who became a \$7 million blocking fullback under Jamieson, should more closely resemble the Pro Bowl player who averaged 100 catches in 1995 and '96. His backup could be rookie Ron Janes, a monster back who can move a pile.

RECEIVERS—The Cardinals have a collection of front-line weapons to rival any in the league. But depth is a problem, especially at tight end.

Outside, the Cardinals have their first-ever pair of 1,000-yard receivers in Rob Moore, the league leader in receiving yardage at 1,584 last year, and Frank Sanders, whose 31 grabs on third down led the league. Their run-after-catch skills will be tested by Trestman.

Metcalf, who has averaged 55 receptions a season during his nine-year career, gives the club an excellent third receiver in the slot. Anthony Edwards is a serviceable guy who doubles as a special teams threat, but he's aging and has lost a step. Chad Carpenter, who appeared to be a rookie bust last season, showed flashes in minicamp. Rookie Phil Savoy, a seventh-round pick, and Fred Brock also are in the hunt.

At tight end, Chris Gedney is a smooth receiver but only a fair blocker. His four touchdown catches were the most by a Cardinals tight end in nine years, and Trestman is dedicated to making the tight end an even bigger weapon. Gedney's backup, Johnny McWilliams, has a load of talent but also a load of baggage. Tobin has had difficulty getting him to play to his potential. The Cardinals will be on the lookout for a veteran to take to camp.

LINE—With the league's worst running attack and worst pass protection (a club-record 78 sacks allowed), fingers were pointed at the line and its coach. The coach is gone, and there might be new faces in four of the five positions.

The only sure bet is left tackle Lomas Brown, whose string of seven consecutive Pro Bowl appearances ended last year. When Brown's contract expires after this season, the heir apparent is mammoth Anthony Clement, a second-round pick who might play on the right side as a rookie. Chris Dishman, a 1997 fourth-round pick, has whipped himself into shape and is the best bet at left guard. He will be backed up by Thomas Guynes.

The liveliest battle should be at center, where Mike Devlin, the starter for most of the past two seasons, is being pushed by Aaron Graham.

The club invested heavily in free-agent right guard Lester Holmes, so that means Anthony Redmon, who started 46 of the past 51 games, is out. The depth will come from youngster Jerome Daniels.

Arizona Cardinals

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
7	Brown, Dave	6-5/230	2-25-70	7	Duke	FA/98	8/6*
15	Case, Stoney	6-3/201	7-7-72	4	New Mexico	D3/95	3/1
16	Plummer, Jake	6-2/197	12-19-74	2	Arizona State	D2/97	10/9

Running Backs

24	Bates, Mario	6-1/217	1-16-73	5	Arizona State	FA/98	12/7*
31	Brown, Rod (FB)	5-11/247	2-28-74	1	North Carolina State	D6a/97	0/0
37	Centers, Larry	6-0/225	6-1-68	9	Stephen F. Austin State	D5/90	15/14
34	Janes, Ron (FB)	6-1/276	2-14-75	R	Missouri	D7c/98	—
30	McElroy, Leeland	5-9/212	6-25-74	3	Texas A&M	D2/96	14/8
20	Moore, Ron	5-10/220	1-26-70	6	Pittsburg (Kan.) State	FA/98	13/4*
29	Murrell, Adrian	5-11/214	10-16-70	6	West Virginia	T-NYJ/98	16/15*
32	Pittman, Michael	6-0/214	8-14-75	R	Fresno State	D4/98	—
45	Smith, Cedric (FB)	5-11/250	5-27-68	6	Florida	FA/96	16/3

Receivers

89	Brock, Fred	5-11/181	11-15-74	2	Southern Miss	FA/96	2/0
12	Carpenter, Chad	5-11/198	7-17-73	1	Washington State	D5/97	0/0
83	Edwards, Anthony	5-10/197	5-26-66	9	New Mexico Highlands	FA/91	16/1
84	Gedney, Chris (TE)	6-5/252	8-9-70	6	Syracuse	FA/97	16/3
80	Hardy, Terry (TE)	6-4/266	5-31-76	R	Southern Miss	D5/98	—
86	Junkin, Trey (TE)	6-2/258	1-23-61	16	Louisiana Tech	FA/96	16/0
87	McWilliams, Johnny (TE)	6-4/271	12-14-72	3	USC	D3/96	16/7
21	Metcalf, Eric	5-10/188	1-23-68	10	Texas	T-SD/98	16/1*
85	Moore, Rob	6-3/203	9-27-68	9	Syracuse	T-NYJ/95	16/16
81	Sanders, Frank	6-2/197	2-17-73	4	Auburn	D2/95	16/16
82	Savoy, Phil	6-2/195	2-16-75	R	Colorado	D6/98	—

Offensive Linemen

75	Brown, Lomas (T)	6-4/290	3-30-63	14	Florida	FA/96	14/14
65	Clement, Anthony (T)	6-7/355	4-10-76	R	SW Louisiana	D2b/98	—
72	Daniels, Jerome (T)	6-5/350	9-13-74	1	Northeastern	FA/97	0/0
69	DeGraffenreid, Allen (G)	6-4/293	6-3-74	1	Vanderbilt	FA/97	0/0
62	Devlin, Mike (C)	6-2/318	11-16-69	6	Iowa	FA/96	15/13
64	Dexter, James (T)	6-7/319	3-3-73	3	South Carolina	D5/96	10/9
67	Dishman, Chris (G)	6-3/320	2-27-74	2	Nebraska	D4/97	8/0
54	Graham, Aaron (C)	6-4/293	5-22-73	3	Nebraska	D4/96	16/4
70	Guynes, Thomas (T)	6-5/330	9-9-74	2	Michigan	FA/97	4/0
71	Holmes, Lester (G)	6-4/315	9-27-69	6	Jackson State	FA/98	15/15*
73	Joyce, Matt (G)	6-7/313	3-30-72	4	Richmond	FA/96	9/6
60	Redmon, Anthony (G)	6-5/308	4-9-71	5	Auburn	D5b/94	16/16
74	Selby, Rob (G)	6-3/290	10-11-67	8	Auburn	FA/95	10/9
68	Wolf, Joe (G)	6-6/297	12-28-66	7	Boston College	D1b/89	15/9

Defensive Linemen

92	Cousins, Jomo (E)	6-5/277	9-2-74	R	Florida A&M	D7a/98	—
76	Drake, Jerry (T)	6-5/310	7-9-69	3	Hastings (Neb.)	FA/95	0/0
96	Ottis, Brad (T)	6-5/281	8-2-72	5	Wayne (Neb.) State	FA/96	16/4
97	Rice, Simeon (E)	6-5/260	2-24-74	3	Illinois	D1/96	16/15
93	Smith, Mark (E)	6-4/290	8-28-74	2	Auburn	D7/97	16/4
98	Swann, Eric (T)	6-5/313	8-16-70	8	None	D1/91	13/13
91	Swinger, Rashod (T)	6-2/286	11-27-74	1	Rutgers	FA/97	1/0
90	Wadsworth, Andre (E)	6-4/278	10-19-74	R	Florida State	D1/98	—
94	Wilson, Bernard (T)	6-3/318	8-17-70	6	Tennessee State	W-TB/94	16/14

Linebackers

51	Cobbins, Lyron	6-0/250	9-17-74	2	Notre Dame	FA/97	6/0
56	Irving, Terry	6-2/236	7-3-71	5	McNeese State	D4c/94	16/6
53	Maddox, Mark	6-1/233	3-23-68	8	Northern Michigan	FA/98	8/1*
50	McCombs, Tony	6-2/246	8-24-74	2	Eastern Kentucky	D6b/97	12/0
57	McKinnon, Ronald	6-0/240	9-20-73	3	North Alabama	FA/96	16/16
95	Miller, Jamir	6-5/266	11-19-73	5	UCLA	D1/94	16/16
55	Sapp, Patrick	6-4/258	5-11-73	3	Clemson	T-SD/98	16/9*
52	Waltz, Zack	6-4/228	2-13-76	R	Dartmouth	D6/98	—

Defensive Backs

28	Bennett, Tommy (S)	6-2/219	2-19-73	3	UCLA	FA/96	13/7
43	Chavous, Corey (S/CB)	6-0/204	1-15-76	R	Vanderbilt	D2a/98	—
38	Harris, Kenny (S)	6-1/203	4-27-75	2	North Carolina State	FA/96	11/0
27	Howard, Ty (CB)	5-9/185	11-30-73	2	Ohio State	D3/97	15/2
22	Knight, Tom (CB)	5-11/196	12-29-74	2	Iowa	D1/97	15/14
42	Lassiter, Kwamie (S)	6-0/202	12-3-69	4	Kansas	FA/95	16/1
39	Malone, Van (S)	5-11/186	7-1-70	5	Texas	FA/98	8/4*
44	McCleskey, J.J. (CB)	5-8/184	4-10-70	5	Tennessee	W-NO/96	13/0
40	Tillman, Pat (S)	5-11/204	11-6-76	R	Arizona State	D7b/98	—
35	Williams, Aeneas (CB)	5-11/202	1-29-68	8	Southern	D3/90	16/16

Specialists

6	Nedney, Joe (K)	6-4/215	3-22-73	3	San Jose State	FA/97	10/0
10	Player, Scott (P)	6-0/220	12-17-69	1	Florida State	FA/98	0/0*

Other free agents invited to camp

Brent Burnstein, DE; Jon Clark, OT; Aaron Collins, LB; Kevin Drake, WR; Jon Himebauch, C; Marchant Kenney, LB; Jeff Lake, WR; Del McGee, CB; George Perry, DE; Jamie Reader, FB; Cory Sauter, QB; Danny Thomas, CB; Lamont Turner, OT; Pascal Volz, WR; Cory Wedel, K; Terry Wilkerson, DE; Marcus Williams, P; Eli Workman, TE; Jon Zatechka, G.

*—Not with Cardinals in 1997.

CARDINALS

Arizona OFFENSE

WR Moore Edwards

LT L. Brown Clement

LG Dishman Guynes

QB Plummer D. Brown
(C) Graham Devlin

RG Holmes Daniels

RT Dexter Joyce

TE Gedney McWilliams

WR Sanders Metcalf

CB Knight McCleskey

RE Rice Cousins

RT M. Smith Wilson

LT Swann Drake

LE Wadsworth Ottis

CB A. Williams Howard

Probable starters listed on top

IRLB Irving McCombs

FS Chavous Lassiter

MLB McKinnon Maddox

SS Bennett Malone

LB Miller Sapp

Arizona DEFENSE

K: Nedney
P: Player
KR: Metcalf
PR: Metcalf

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Mario Bates, RB (FA/Saints); Dave Brown, QB (released/Giants); Lester Holmes, G (FA/Raiders); Mark Maddox, LB (FA/Bills); Van Malone, S (FA/Lions); Eric Metcalf, KR/WR (trade/Chargers); Adrian Murrell, RB (trade/Jets); Patrick Sapp, LB (trade/Chargers).

Key losses: Brent Alexander, S (FA); Michael Bankston, DE (FA/Bengals); Pat Carter, TE (FA); Matt Darby, S (FA); Jeff Feagles, P (FA/Seahawks); Kent Graham, QB (FA/Giants); Eric Hill, LB (FA/Rams); Anthony Redmon, RG (FA); Kevin Williams, KR/WR (FA/Bills).

Draft picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Andre Wadsworth	DE	Florida State
2nd	Corey Chavous	S/CB	Vanderbilt
2nd	Anthony Clement	T	SW Louisiana
4th	Michael Pittman	RB	Fresno State
5th	Terry Hardy	TE	Southern Miss
6th	Zack Walz	LB	Dartmouth
7th	Phil Savoy	WR	Colorado
7th	Jomo Cousins	DE	Florida A&M
7th	Pat Tillman	S	Arizona State
7th	Ron Janes	RB	Missouri

Past five No. 1 picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	RB Garrison Hearst	Starter with 49ers
	T Ernest Dye	Reserve with Rams
1994	LB Jamir Miller	Starter with Cardinals
1995	None	
1996	DE Simeon Rice	Starter with Cardinals
1997	CB Tom Knight	Starter with Cardinals

Coaching Staff

Coach: Vince Tobin. **Offensive staff:** George Warhop (offen-

sive line) • George "Geep" Chryst (quarterbacks) • Vic Rapp (wide receivers) • Marc Trestman (offensive coordinator) • Johnny Roland (running backs). **Defensive staff:** Joe Greene (defensive line) • David Marmie (defensive backs) • Dave McGinnis (defensive coordinator) • Glenn Pires (linebackers). **Others:** Alan Everest (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 4-12 (5th in NFC East); 2-6 in division; 3-9 in conference; 3-5 at home; 1-7 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Tobin's regular-season record: 11-21 in two seasons with Cardinals.

Tobin's postseason record: None.

Team record past five years: 30-50 (.375, ranks 24th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1982

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*294.6	11	24
Rushing offense	*78.4	15	30
Passing offense	*216.1	3	10
Scoring offense	283	12	25
Total defense	*339.1	14	27
Rushing defense	*136.3	14	27
Passing defense	*202.9	11	15
Scoring defense	379	14	25
Takeaways	20	14	29
Giveaways	42	14	T28
Turnover differential	-22	14	29
Sacks	34	15	26
Sacks allowed	78	15	30

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Despite playing in the league's 24th-ranked offense last season, Arizona's Rob Moore led the NFL in catches of 25 or more yards:

Player, team	25-yard-plus catches
Rob Moore, Arizona	20
Michael Irvin, Dallas	14
Rod Smith, Denver	14
Yancey Thigpen, Pittsburgh	13
Irving Fryar, Philadelphia	12
Antonio Freeman, Green Bay	12
Seven receivers tied at	11

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Dallas	3:05
Sept. 13	at Seattle	1:15
Sept. 20	PHILADELPHIA	5:20
Sept. 27	at St. Louis	12:01
Oct. 4	OAKLAND	1:05
Oct. 11	CHICAGO	1:05
Oct. 18	at N.Y. Giants	1:01
Oct. 25	Open date	
Nov. 1	at Detroit	1:01
Nov. 8	WASHINGTON	2:05
Nov. 15	DALLAS	2:15
Nov. 22	at Washington	1:01
Nov. 29	at Kansas City	12:01
Dec. 6	N.Y. GIANTS	2:05
Dec. 13	at Philadelphia	1:01
Dec. 20	NEW ORLEANS	2:15
Dec. 27	SAN DIEGO	2:15

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 30TH

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Cincinnati	L	21-24
Sept. 7	DALLAS (OT)	W	25-22
Sept. 14	at Washington (OT)	L	13-19
Sept. 21	Open date		
Sept. 28	at Tampa Bay	L	18-19
Oct. 5	MINNESOTA	L	19-20
Oct. 12	N.Y. GIANTS	L	13-27
Oct. 19	at Philadelphia (OT)	L	10-13
Oct. 26	TENNESSEE	L	14-41
Nov. 2	PHILADELPHIA	W	31-21
Nov. 9	at Dallas	L	6-24
Nov. 16	at N.Y. Giants	L	10-19
Nov. 23	at Baltimore	W	16-13
Nov. 30	PITTSBURGH (OT)	L	20-26
Dec. 7	WASHINGTON	L	28-38
Dec. 14	at New Orleans	L	10-27
Dec. 21	ATLANTA	W	29-26

Miscellaneous

President: William V. Bidwill.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Sun Devil Stadium (73,243, grass).

Ticket information: 602-379-0102.

Flagship radio station: KDUS-AM, 1060.

Training site: Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Ariz.; 520-523-1818.



Swann has been a handful for offensive linemen the past few years. With the arrival of first-round pick Andre Wadsworth, Swann's effectiveness could increase.

James Dexter should retain the right tackle job he won from Joe Wolf, but Clement and Matt Joyce, who is moving from guard, could push him.

DEFENSE

LINE—In time, this could be one of the best lines anywhere.

At left end is Wadsworth, who was widely considered the best player in the '98 draft. At left tackle is Eric Swann, a three-time Pro Bowl participant and one of the most dominant players in the league. At right tackle is Mark Smith, a seventh-round find in '97 who broke into the lineup late in the season, made 56 tackles and earned All-Rookie recognition. At right end is Simeon Rice, a former first-round pick

who was the 1996 NFL defensive rookie of the year.

That collection isn't the only reason that expectations are high. The second four consists of Brad Ottis, Bernard Wilson, Jerry Drake and Cousins—all potential starters elsewhere. Ottis was the first backup at three of the four positions last season, and Wilson was a starter until Smith moved him out. Drake was expected to battle for a starting job before an injury knocked him out. Cousins is raw but talented and could be this year's Mark Smith.

The group appears capable of getting to the passer more than 34 times and of tightening up against the run, where the club was hurt late last season.

LINEBACKERS—The group is headed by Jamir Miller, who is developing into a team leader on the field and in the locker room. He'll be playing on the left side—the same as Wadsworth, Swann and Pro Bowl corner Aeneas Williams. With that overload of talent, the Cardinals will have a multitude of options on blitzing schemes. Miller's skills as a pass rusher are almost certain to be used more.

In the middle, Ronald McKinnon inherits the job from Eric Hill, who signed with the Rams. McKinnon filled in admirably when Hill was hurt, but whether McKinnon is big enough to hold up when playing regularly is questionable. It remains to be seen if he can plug a hole like a classic middle linebacker. If he gets hurt, Mark Maddox is the sole reserve.

Still, the real question is on the right side, where Terry Irving will go to camp No. 1. Irving is not big, raising the question about whether he can hold up against the run. The Cardinals were vulnerable on the right side last year, and Irving always was a step slow in pass coverage. He will be challenged by Tony McCombs, who was injured most of his rookie year, and Sapp. If Sapp doesn't win the starting job on the right side, he'll be Miller's backup on the left side.

The pass coverage skills of this group are suspect, but playing behind a top-notch line should make the linebackers look better against the run.

SECONDARY—The leader of this group is Williams, who took two interceptions back for touchdowns last season. His 27 picks since 1994 are the most in the league. Williams is known for his speed, his work ethic (maybe it will rub off) and his in-your-face cover skills (maybe that will, too).

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	A
Offensive backfield:	B+	Linebackers:	C-
Offensive line:	D	Secondary:	C-
Receivers:	B	Special teams:	B-

Corner Tom Knight took the usual rookie lumps, sometimes literally, as he was injury-prone. The scary thing is that Knight did not seem to improve, so the jury still is out. The third corner, J.J. McCleskey, played most of minicamp after Knight turned an ankle. McCleskey is a tough competitor who could step into the starting job if Knight continues to struggle. No. 4 corner Ty Howard is finding out that just being fast doesn't cut it in the NFL.

The biggest question marks are the safeties. Matt Darby and Brent Alexander, who combined for two interceptions in two years as starters, are gone. Tommy Bennett and Kwamie Lassiter go to camp as the probable starters, but by opening day it could be Chavous, who played cornerback in a sophisticated scheme at Vanderbilt, and free-agent acquisition Van Malone, who started the past two years for Detroit.

SPECIAL TEAMS

These were the most improved units on the team last season, but two valuable weapons—punter Jeff Feagles and return specialist Kevin Williams—left via free agency.

The punter will be either Scott Player, who most recently was employed by an overnight shipping firm, or undrafted rookie Marcus Williams. Player is an effective directional punter, while Williams launches boomers with excellent hang time but needs to learn the intricacies of placing the ball.

Kevin Williams, one of the league's top dual-purpose returners last season, has been replaced by another of the league's top dual-purpose returners in Metcalf.

The kicking will be handled by Joe Nedney, who has a strong leg. By Cardinals' standards, he has an incredible leg. He had 16 touchbacks in '97, more than the club had in the three previous seasons combined. Nedney did not miss a field goal inside 40 yards; alas, he wasn't accurate on the long ones, making only 3-of-9 attempts beyond 40 yards. He received some offseason coaching from Jan Stenerud in hopes of eliminating his tendency to hook the long ones.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

As usual, schedule-makers seemingly have done their best to put the Cardinals behind the eight-ball early. Three of their first four are on the road, the league's annual stance against early-season games in the heat. But do the schedule-makers really believe it is going to be any more comfortable in the heat and humidity of Dallas on opening day than it would be in Tempe, Ariz., where at least it's a dry heat?

A key will be whether the Cardinals can overcome a possible 0-2 start, as a trip to Seattle follows in Week 2. There is a nasty November, too, starting with a visit to Detroit, followed by home games with Washington and Dallas, then visits to Washington and Kansas City.

If there's anything left after that, the December schedule is favorable.

The Cardinals, with an improved roster, have a shot in non-division games against St. Louis, Oakland, Chicago, New Orleans and San Diego. All but the Rams are at home. The visit to St. Louis will be the Cardinals' first since leaving for Arizona 10 years ago.

BOTTOM LINE

It might be another year before the birds are the word in the NFC East, but the Cardinals should fly out of the cellar and finish one game either side of break-even. There never has been more optimism with newcomers such as Murrell, Wadsworth, Chavous and Bates.

With Philadelphia appearing down, the Cardinals should compete with Dallas, New York and Washington in the NFC East.

TSN

Lee Shappell covers the Cardinals for the Arizona Gazette.



New coach, new staff, new schemes —now all that's needed is new results

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 3rd

BY MICKEY SPAGNOLA

There is a new coach and six new assistants. There is a new offensive system and a modified defensive scheme. There is a new, no-nonsense approach to football and an absence of sideshow follies. Now if the Cowboys can just transpose their 6-10 record from last season, when they were as stale as week-old bread.

Shame on them. With the likes of Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith, Michael Irvin, Deion Sanders, Larry Allen, Darren Woodson and Leon Lett still around, the Cowboys didn't have an excuse for last season's debacle. That's why Barry Switzer is out and Chan Gailey is in. That is why most of the offensive staff has changed and why Jerry Jones put a premium on hiring a new offensive coordinator, who also is his new coach. That is why holdover defensive coordinator Dave Campo has tinkered with a 9-year-old defensive scheme, knowing these Cowboys just ain't what they used to be.

But understand this—the Cowboys aren't that far off, considering six of last year's losses were by no more than seven points. And that's from a team that set a club record (for a 16-game season) for fewest rushing touchdowns (six) and allowed each of their last nine opponents to rush for more than 100 yards.

The fresh air could do wonders for this team.

COACHING

Gailey is a soft-spoken Georgia boy. He neither smokes nor drinks. He shies from the limelight. But don't assume that he is nothing more than Jones' puppet. He's a coach's coach, having devoted his entire pro career to landing this job.

He already has the attention of his players, a departure from the last two years of Switzer's reign. He already has the attention of his assistants, more from respect than demand. He already has the ear of the owner, his thoroughness the only leverage he needs. And he has not had to scream to seize control. If anything, Gailey has made football of prime importance around Valley Ranch, causing those who were embarrassed by last year's performance to follow his example.

He has brought in a new offense, which could take time for the players to comprehend. But he also has brought with him responsibility, letting everyone know that he ultimately is responsible for this offense—its strategy, play-calling and results. That's a novel approach. The new offense and the altered defense has created renewed vigor among players. Old-hat boredom has been replaced by healthy paranoia—these well-paid, three-ring stars know even they must prove themselves again. With Gailey around, nothing is sacred any more.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Aikman still is "the guy." But will he be the same "guy" in Gailey's offense?

Aikman's rigid consistency was tailor-made for the Norv Turner-Ernie Zampese offenses of the past seven years. So was his ability to get the ball to his perimeter receivers and his willingness to share the offensive spotlight with the running game. But Aikman has been forced back into quarterback school, including lining up in shotgun formation for the first time in his NFL career. Gailey's offense is based less on timing and more on true reads, a departure from what has been drilled into Aikman. Even so, the quarterback approves of Gailey. In addition, Aikman has welcomed the challenge of learning something new at 31, as if he is motivated by proving himself again.

Jason Garrett's only concern is proving worthy of backup status after



Smith will be out to prove that last season (1,074 yards, four TDs) was an aberration, not the beginning of the end of a Hall of Fame career.

five years as the clipboard-carrying third quarterback. Garrett's ability to move the ball to various receivers and throw the short stuff over the middle makes him a good fit for Gailey's system. His relatively low salary also was a good fit, compared to the \$500,000 due to former backup Wade Wilson, 39, who is retiring.

RUNNING BACKS—Smith isn't what he used to be, but he still is better than he was in '97, when he gained 1,074 yards, his lowest total since his rookie season, and scored a career-low four touchdowns. This year, with his line expected to be healthier and the anticipated return of trusty fullback Daryl Johnston, Smith will get a chance to prove he is better than his '97 numbers.

But don't expect the new staff to coddle Smith. Gailey and his offensive coaches have no allegiance to Smith. He will have to prove himself; if he can't, the Cowboys have some insurance. The coaches decided former Pro Bowler Chris Warren was a better backup than

Sherman Williams. Warren is no threat to Smith's lead-role status, but certainly creates a better backfield presence than Williams if Smith has to leave with an injury, which he did in five games last season. At times, Warren could play in a tandem with Smith, but Gailey insists a lead-blocking fullback still is required.

That would be Johnston, if he recovers psychologically from last year's season-ending neck surgery. Physically, he is fine. But who knows what will happen when Johnston sticks his head inside on a lead block again. That is why the Cowboys are preparing Nicky Sualua, who proved to be a load late last season when he figured out who to block.

RECEIVERS—Same old, same old: Irvin and a bunch of questions. Irvin still is the lead receiver; don't let last season's slight dip to 75 receptions and 1,180 yards fool you. Irvin had nine touchdown receptions, one short of a career-high. But like Aikman, the new offense could initially take Irvin out of his comfort zone. Still, Irvin is the least of the Cowboys' problems; finding a complementary second receiver is the real chore and there are several candidates.

Most prominent is fourth-year pro Billy Davis, who signed a three-year deal worthy of starter's pay. But Davis has only three career receptions, so the Cowboys backed up their hunch by signing Ernie Mills, who had 39 receptions in '95 for Gailey with the Steelers.

There's also Jimmy Oliver, a second-round pick of the Chargers in '95, who could become a serious deep threat if he can stay healthy. And there's '97 fourth-rounder Macey Brooks, a big guy (6-5, 220) who missed last season with a fractured forearm.

Stepfret Williams is solid as the slot receiver in the nickel and four- and five-receiver alignments. There also is talk of Sanders being a part-time receiver.

Second-year pro David LaFleur should replace Eric Bjornson as the starting tight end. LaFleur is a better blocker, but Bjornson is the better receiver.

LINE—If the Cowboys are to rebound in '98, the line will be the trampoline. It was no coincidence that Aikman, Smith and Irvin's numbers dropped last season, and that will not change—no matter the coordinator or offensive style—if the line does not improve greatly.

The Cowboys will be better at left tackle than last season, when Mark Tuinei's knee injury limited him to six games and George Hegamin was mediocre. The reason is Allen, who is moving from guard to left tackle. He is one of the best linemen in the league.

Center Clay Shiver, a first-time starter in '97, improved late last season, and right tackle Erik Williams is what he is—an OK tackle.

The key will be the guard play and development of second-round pick Flozell Adams, a versatile tackle who might get a look at guard. Guard Nate Newton is trying to come back after an awful season complicated by knee and shoulder injuries. Newton showed he was serious in the offseason, dropping more than 70 pounds. The Cowboys also signed free agent Everett McIver to replace Allen at right guard. At this point, he is a serviceable guard with potential. Developing backups is a big concern.

DEFENSE

LINE—The Cowboys know they no longer can overpower opponents with talent and depth, so they are going to play a variation of the 4-3 defense they have used for the past nine seasons.

The roles of tackle Chad Hennings and the ends

Dallas Cowboys

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
8	Aikman, Troy	6-4/219	11-21-66	10	UCLA	D1/89	16/16
17	Garrett, Jason	6-2/195	3-28-66	6	Princeton	FA/93	1/0

Running Backs

48	Johnston, Daryl (FB)	6-2/242	2-10-66	10	Syracuse	D2/89	6/6
32	Morgan, Beau	5-10/192	8-4-75	1	Air Force	FA/97	0/0
22	Smith, Emmitt	5-9/209	5-15-69	9	Florida	D1/90	16/16
36	Smith, Tarik	5-10/200	4-16-75	R	California	D7a/98	—
45	Sualua, Nicky (FB)	5-11/257	4-15-75	2	Ohio State	D4c/97	10/1
42	Warren, Chris	6-2/228	1-24-68	9	Ferrum (Va.)	FA/98	15/13*
20	Williams, Sherman	5-8/202	8-13-73	4	Alabama	D2a/95	16/0

Receivers

86	Bjornson, Eric (TE)	6-4/236	12-15-71	4	Washington	D4a/95	14/14
82	Brooks, Macey	6-5/220	2-2-75	2	James Madison	D4b/97	0/0
87	Davis, Billy	6-1/205	7-6-72	4	Pittsburgh	FA/95	16/0
88	Irvin, Michael	6-2/207	3-5-66	11	Miami (Fla.)	D1/88	16/16
89	LaFleur, David (TE)	6-7/280	1-29-74	2	LSU	D1/97	16/5
85	Mills, Ernie	5-11/192	10-28-68	8	Florida	FA/98	10/5*
81	Monroe, Rodrick (TE)	6-4/244	7-30-75	R	Cincinnati	D7c/98	—
83	Oliver, Jimmy	5-10/186	1-30-73	4	TCU	FA/98	0/0*
80	Williams, Stepfret	6-0/170	6-14-73	3	Northeast Louisiana	D3b/96	16/0

Offensive Linemen

76	Adams, Flozell (T)	6-7/335	5-10-75	R	Michigan State	D2/98	—
73	Allen, Larry (G)	6-3/326	11-27-71	5	Sonoma State (Calif.)	D2/94	16/16
64	Fleming, Antonio (G)	6-3/309	2-6-74	R	Georgia	D7b/98	—
70	Hellestrae, Dale (G)	6-5/291	7-11-62	14	SMU	T-Rai/90	16/0
66	Hutson, Tony (G)	6-3/313	3-13-74	2	NE Oklahoma State	FA/97	5/1
67	McIver, Everett (G)	6-5/318	8-5-70	5	Elizabeth City (N.C.) St.	FA/98	14/14*
61	Newton, Nate (G)	6-3/295	12-20-61	13	Florida A&M	FA/86	13/13
68	Ross, Oliver (T/G)	6-4/300	9-27-74	R	Iowa State	D5b/98	0/0
77	Scifres, Steve (T)	6-4/300	1-22-72	2	Wyoming	D3b/97	5/0
50	Shiver, Clay (C)	6-2/294	12-7-72	3	Florida State	D3a/96	16/16
79	Williams, Erik (T)	6-6/328	9-7-68	8	Central State (Ohio)	D3c/91	15/15

Defensive Linemen

96	Anderson, Antonio (T)	6-6/318	6-4-73	2	Syracuse	D4a/97	16/5
91	Benson, Darren (T)	6-7/308	8-25-74	4	Trinity Valley CC (Texas)	FA/95	6/0
98	Ellis, Greg (E)	6-6/283	8-14-75	R	North Carolina	D1/98	—
95	Hennings, Chad (T)	6-6/291	10-20-65	7	Air Force	D11/88	11/10
78	Lett, Leon (T)	6-6/295	10-12-68	8	Emporia (Kan.) State	D7/91	3/3
99	McCormack, Hurvin (T/E)	6-5/284	4-6-72	5	Indiana	FA/94	13/0
94	Myers, Michael (T)	6-2/286	1-20-76	R	Alabama	D4/98	—
97	Pittman, Kavika (E)	6-6/267	10-9-74	3	McNeese State	D2a/96	15/0
51	Thomas, Broderick (E)	6-4/254	2-20-67	10	Nebraska	FA/96	16/0
92	Tolbert, Tony (E)	6-6/263	12-29-67	10	Texas-El Paso	D4/89	16/16

Linebackers

52	Coakley, Dexter	5-10/215	10-20-72	2	Appalachian State	D3a/97	16/16
56	Godfrey, Randall	6-2/237	4-6-73	3	Georgia	D2b/96	16/16
54	Hambrick, Darren	6-2/216	8-30-75	R	South Carolina	D5a/98	—
58	Hemsley, Nate	6-0/219	5-15-74	1	Syracuse	FA/97	2/0
55	Strickland, Fred	6-2/251	8-15-66	11	Purdue	FA/96	15/14

Defensive Backs

35	Davis, Wendell (CB)	5-10/183	6-27-73	3	Oklahoma	D6/96	15/0
23	Mathis, Kevin (CB)	5-9/172	4-9-74	2	Texas A&M-Commerce	FA/97	16/3
27	Mobley, Singor (S)	5-11/195	10-12-72	2	Washington State	FA/97	12/0
43	Reese, Izell (S)	6-2/193	5-7-74	R	UAB	D6/98	—
21	Sanders, Deion (CB)	6-1/195	8-9-67	10	Florida State	FA/95	13/12
26	Smith, Kevin (CB)	5-11/190	4-7-70	7	Texas A&M	D1a/92	16/16
24	Stoutmire, Omar (S)	5-11/198	7-9-74	2	Fresno State	D7/97	16/2
31	Teague, George (S)	6-1/196	2-18-71	6	Alabama	FA/98	15/6*
37	Vaughn, Lee (CB)	5-11/184	11-27-74	2	Wyoming	D6/97	0/0
30	Wheaton, Kenny (CB/S)	5-10/190	3-8-75	2	Oregon	D3c/97	2/0
25	Williams, Charlie (S)	6-0/189	2-2-72	4	Bowling Green	D3/95	16/0
28	Woodson, Darren (S)	6-1/219	4-25-69	7	Arizona State	D2b/92	14/14

Specialists

3	Cunningham, Richie (K)	5-10/167	8-18-70	2	SW Louisiana	FA/97	16/0
4	Gowin, Toby (P)	5-10/167	3-30-75	2	North Texas	FA/97	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Ronald Bailey, CB; Kent Booth, G; Greg Bright, LB; Barry Cantrell, K/P; Chike Egbuniwe, LB; Anthony Eubanks, WR; Junior Filikitunga, DT; Denny Fortney, DE; Cory Geason, TE; Dan Gonzalez, QB; Michael Hicks, CB; Taj Johnson, WR; John Jones, G; Mike Kiselak, G; Max Knake, QB; Zebbie Lethridge, S; Jeff Ogden, WR; Todd Perkins, G; Bobby Rodriguez, FB; Sean Simms, TE; Robert Thomas, LB; Brett Williams, DE; David Zadel, DE/LB.

*—Not with Cowboys in 1997.

COWBOYS

Dallas OFFENSE

QB Aikman Garrett
(C) Shiver Scifres/Kiselak

RB Smith Warren

FB Johnston Sualua

WR Davis/St. Williams

TE LaFleur Bjornson

LT Allen Adams

LG Newton Huston

C McIver Scifres

RG E. Williams Adams/Hutson

RT Irvin Brooks

CB K. Smith Wheaton

RE Pittman McCormack

RT Lett Anderson

LT Hennings Benson

LE Ellis Tolbert

CB Sanders Mathis

Coakley Hemsley/Hambrick

WLB Teague/Stoutmire Wheaton

MLB Strickland Godfrey

SS Woodson C. Williams

SLB Godfrey Thomas

Probable starters listed on top

Dallas DEFENSE

K: Cunningham
P: Gowin
KR: Oliver, Mathis
PR: Sanders, Mathis

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Everett McIver, G (FA/Dolphins); Ernie Mills, WR (released/Panthers); Jimmy Oliver, WR (released/Chargers); George Teague, FS, (FA/Dolphins); Chris Warren, RB (FA/Seahawks).

Key losses: Shante Carver, DE (FA); George Hegamin, OL (FA/Eagles); Brock Marion, FS (FA/Dolphins).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Greg Ellis	DE	North Carolina
2nd	Flozell Adams	T	Michigan State
4th	Michael Myers	DT	Alabama
5th	Darren Hambrick	LB	South Carolina
5th	Oliver Ross	T	Iowa State
6th	Izell Reese	S	UAB
7th	Tarik Smith	RB	California
7th	Antonio Fleming	G	Georgia
7th	Rodrick Monroe	TE	Cincinnati

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	None	
1994	DE Shante Carver	Unsigned free agent
1995	None	
1996	None	
1997	TE David LaFleur	Starter with Cowboys

Coaching Staff

Coach: Chan Gailey. **Offensive staff:** Buddy Geis (quarterbacks) • Steve Hoffman (kickers/quality control) • Hudson Houck (offensive line) • Les Miles (tight ends) • Dwain Painter (wide receivers) • Tommie Robinson (offensive assistant), Clarence Shelton (running backs). **Defensive staff:** Jim Bates (assistant head coach/defensive line) • Dave Campo (defensive coordinator) • George Edwards (lineback-

ers) • Jim Jeffcoat (assistant defensive line) • Clancy Pendergast (defensive assistant/quality control) • Mike Zimmer (defensive backs). **Others:** Joe Avezzano (special teams) • Jow Juraszek (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 6-10 (4th in NFC East); 3-5 in division; 4-8 in conference; 5-3 at home; 1-7 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Gailey's regular-season record: first season as NFL coach.

Gailey's postseason record: None.

Team record past five years: 52-28 (.650, ranks 5th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1996

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*298.6	8	20
Rushing offense	*102.3	11	20
Passing offense	*196.3	10	20
Scoring offense	304	9	22
Total defense	*282.3	2	2
Rushing defense	*124.6	12	24
Passing defense	*157.6	1	1
Scoring defense	314	T7	T13
Takeaways	19	15	30
Giveaways	23	T4	T11
Turnover differential	-4	10	T22
Sacks	38	T10	T18
Sacks allowed	39	6	14

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Does it seem like every time Troy Aikman throws a touchdown pass, Michael Irvin is catching it? You're not dreaming. Here's how the Aikman-Irvin tandem compares to some of the top quarterback/receiver duos in NFL history:

QB	Career TD passes	Favorite receiver	TDs	Pct. of total
Steve Young	193	Jerry Rice	75	38.9
Troy Aikman	129	Michael Irvin	45	34.9
Jim Kelly	237	Andre Reed	65	27.4
John Hadl	244	Lance Alworth	56	23.0
Sonny Jurgensen	255	Charley Taylor	53	20.8
Johnny Unitas	290	Raymond Berry	63	21.7
Dan Marino	385	Mark Clayton	79	20.5
Joe Montana	273	Jerry Rice	55	20.1
Warren Moon	279	Drew Hill	43	15.4
John Elway	278	Vance Johnson	35	12.6

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	ARIZONA	3:05
Sept. 13	at Denver	2:15
Sept. 21	at N.Y. Giants (Mon.)	8:20
Sept. 27	OAKLAND	12:01
Oct. 4	at Washington	1:01
Oct. 11	CAROLINA	12:01
Oct. 18	at Chicago	3:15
Oct. 25	Open date	
Nov. 2	at Philadelphia (Mon.)	8:20
Nov. 8	N.Y. GIANTS	12:01
Nov. 15	at Arizona	2:15
Nov. 22	SEATTLE	12:01
Nov. 26	MINNESOTA (Thanks.)	3:05
Dec. 6	at New Orleans	12:01
Dec. 13	at Kansas City	3:15
Dec. 20	PHILADELPHIA	3:15
Dec. 27	WASHINGTON	7:20

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T23RD

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Pittsburgh	W	37-7
Sept. 7	at Arizona (OT)	L	22-25
Sept. 15	PHILADELPHIA	W	21-20
Sept. 21	Open date		
Sept. 28	CHICAGO	W	27-3
Oct. 5	at N.Y. Giants	L	17-20
Oct. 13	at Washington	L	16-21
Oct. 19	JACKSONVILLE	W	26-22
Oct. 26	at Philadelphia	L	12-13
Nov. 2	at San Francisco	L	10-17
Nov. 9	ARIZONA	W	24-6
Nov. 16	WASHINGTON	W	17-14
Nov. 23	at Green Bay	L	17-45
Nov. 27	TENNESSEE	L	14-27
Dec. 8	CAROLINA	L	13-23
Dec. 14	at Cincinnati	L	24-31
Dec. 21	N.Y. GIANTS	L	7-20

Miscellaneous

President: Jerry Jones.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Texas Stadium (65,812, artificial).

Ticket information: 972-579-5000.

Flagship radio station: KVIL-FM, 103.7.

Training site: St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas; 214-556-9900.



Irvin did a lot of celebrating last year, as he caught nine TD passes. He would be helped by an effective complement on the other side.

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	C+
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	C	Secondary:	B+
Receivers:	C+	Special teams:	A

Depth is lacking, but Broderick Thomas has moved back to linebacker after a brief stint last year as a bulked-up, pass-rushing end. In addition, keep an eye on rookie Darren Hambrick, who has good speed.

SECONDARY—There's only one question: Who replaces free safety Brock Marion? The Cowboys are more than set at the other positions with Sanders at right corner, Kevin Smith at left corner and Woodson at strong safety. Woodson and Sanders arguably are the best at their positions in the NFL, but Smith must improve his technique after a penalty-plagued '97.

There are several candidates at free safety, including George Teague, Omar Stoutmire, Charlie Williams, Kenny Wheaton and Lee Vaughn. Teague and Stoutmire figure to have the inside track. Teague played for the Cowboys in 1996, starting half the season for the injured Marion. Last season, Stoutmire played safety in the nickel package as a rookie. Williams has the physical tools but hasn't mastered the mental aspects of the position. And Wheaton, a college cornerback who missed most of last season with a shoulder injury, has great cover instincts. All should figure into the nickel package.

SPECIAL TEAMS

This could be a highly productive unit if a solid kick returner is found. There is nothing wrong with the kicking game—Richie Cunningham made 34-of-37 field-goal attempts last year in his first NFL season. Cunningham proved deadly inside 50 yards and showed he has the leg to make longer field goals.

Toby Gowin did an acceptable job punting as a rookie, and his high, hanging kickoffs, usually landing inside the 5, allowed the Cowboys to lead the league in kickoff coverage.

Sanders is a threat to score when returning punts. The challenge is to replace Herschel Walker—who was not expected back—and Marion as the deep men on kickoffs. The most likely candidates are speedy Kevin Mathis and two guys who might not make the final cut—Oliver and Sherman Williams.

The club is fortunate to have Dale Hellestrae, perhaps the NFL's most accurate deep snapper.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

Unlike past seasons, when they faced the NFL's toughest schedule (based on opponents' winning percentage), the Cowboys have the NFL's sixth-easiest schedule this season. The Giants, who won the NFC East last season, certainly capitalized on their fifth-place schedule last year; perhaps the Cowboys can capitalize on their fourth-place schedule in '98.

Long stretches of tough games are absent from the schedule, unless Arizona is as good as advertised. If they are, the Cowboys' first three games—against Arizona, Denver and the Giants—could prove vital.

In a departure from previous seasons—dating to 1986—the Cowboys will close the season with back-to-back home games. In addition, four of their last six games are at home. And for the first time since 1992, the Cowboys do not have both Green Bay and San Francisco on the schedule, proving there are some benefits to finishing fourth.

BOTTOM LINE

The Cowboys still have the skill-position players to win the NFC East and cause problems in the playoffs. But their ability to properly repair both lines will determine if Gailey and the new systems can turn 6-10 into 10-6.

Don't be surprised if a more organized, disciplined approach doesn't make a difference in close games this season; last season, the Cowboys lost far too many of those games.

TSN

Mickey Spagnola is a writer based in Dallas.

This year's Giants could be better — but the record may not reflect that

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 2nd

BY NEIL BEST

Remember that carefree, bygone era when the Giants could somehow scrape by with a dynamic young defense, a hugely favorable turnover ratio and an occasional big play on offense? Yep, those were the good old days.

Alas, 1997 was a long time ago.

After taking advantage of the weakest schedule in the NFL last season to produce a dream run to the NFC East title, the Giants must try to do it again against an improved division and a nightmare of a non-division schedule.

It's a good thing the Giants bowed out of the playoffs early last season, with a 23-22 come-from-ahead debacle against the Vikings, because it gave them plenty of time to scout their 1998 opponents. Their first-place schedule got them matchups with both Super Bowl teams and five of the last eight playoff teams, including three of the last four.

If Jim Fassel leads his team to another 10-5-1 record, he will deserve his second consecutive NFL Coach of the Year Award. "My attitude is, 'Hey, that's it; that's our path, that's our road ahead,'" Fassel said of the brutal schedule. "If we want to take the next step up, we will (accept the challenge)."

The key is maintaining last season's level on defense while upgrading the offense behind second-year starting quarterback Danny Kanell and a new array of skill-position players.

There was margin for error last season. That margin is gone.

COACHING

Fassel didn't live up to his billing as an offensive guru in 1997, mostly because injuries and lack of talent did not give him enough material. But he was a huge success overall as coach, particularly as a motivator and a leader. After arriving in New York as the "other" new coach in town (Bill Parcells got most of the attention), Fassel quickly made a name for himself.

The team's 1997 success also enhanced his power and credibility heading into the offseason, when he continued to reshape the roster. The big moves were releasing Dave Brown and Rodney Hampton, neither of whom produced during injury-shortened seasons.

Fassel also said goodbye to players such as tight end Aaron Pierce, who did not meet his standards for production and energy, while urging the team to sign free agents such as quarterback Kent Graham and tailback LeShon Johnson, who played for the Cardinals when Fassel was their offensive coordinator. But Johnson was diagnosed with cancer in June and isn't expected to play this season.

The challenges this season will be finding a way to squeeze more out of the offense, especially by continuing to develop Kanell, and maintaining the scrappy, underdog mentality that helped a young team overachieve in 1997.

Defensive coordinator John Fox is a rising star who could become a coaching candidate around the league if the unit has another solid season.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Kanell is the unquestioned starter entering the season, but then so was Brown last season. As effective as Kanell was in going 7-2-1 as a first-year starter, his modest passer rating of 70.7 leaves plenty of room for improvement.

With Fassel planning to expand his duties and options, Kanell must prepare to take the next step, and a key will be more consistency in his throwing. He does not have the strongest arm in the world, but in Fassel's system, he doesn't need to. He simply must make quick deci-



While the Giants have questions at tailback, there are no problems at fullback. Way is one of the best in the league and is a vital component of the offense.

sions and fire accurate short- and intermediate-range passes. Kanell, an instinctive player and a proven winner, should be able to do that.

If Kanell falters or is injured, the Giants are confident in Graham, who enjoyed his greatest success under Fassel in 1996. He has a powerful arm and is a savvy veteran.

The No. 3 man, second-year pro Mike Cherry, is a raw prospect. But Cherry has a gun, and many in the organization believe he can be a starter within two to three years.

RUNNING BACKS—The committee approach worked fairly well last year, and that's the plan again unless someone emerges to assume the bulk of the carries. The logical candidate is Tyrone Wheatley, but he has failed to take advantage of chances before because of injuries and ineffectiveness. This might be his last chance. He has the most well-rounded size/speed/strength package of the tailbacks.

Wheatley is far from the only option, though. Fassel loves second-year man Tiki Barber, who was the starter at the beginning and end of his rookie season, but the plan is to save wear and tear on Barber by focusing his work on third downs and punt returns. Gary Brown is the closest thing to a replacement for Hampton, as he can gain the tough yards between the tackles.

The given in the backfield is Charles Way, the best combination blocking/rushing fullback in the NFL. Way had a large share of the rushing duties last season, and Fassel plans to go to him often again. Way, whose 151 carries were one short of Wheatley's team-leading total, would carry the ball even more if he weren't so indispensable as a blocker.

RECEIVERS—As with the tailbacks, the Giants hope to unearth

enough quality at wide receiver by bringing in plenty of quantity. They added receivers in the second and third rounds of the draft in Joe Jurevicius and Brian Alford, continuing a so-far-futile, three-decade search for an elite receiver.

The starters likely will be Ike Hilliard and Chris Calloway. Hilliard, the No. 7 overall pick in the 1997 draft, seemingly was on his way to a superb rookie season when he suffered a season-ending neck injury in Week 2 that required delicate spinal surgery. He looks like he will be back to normal; if not, the Giants are in big trouble. Calloway is Mr. Reliable, having led the team in receptions three consecutive years, but on a better passing team he'd be a complementary, possession-type receiver, not the feature guy.

The hope is that someone emerges as a clear No. 3. Jurevicius has a good shot because of his 6-5 height and good speed. Alford gives the team the deep threat it lacks but is a raw talent. The wild card is Amani Toomer, who has been disappointing since being drafted 34th overall in 1996. He could be anywhere from the No. 3 receiver to off the team pending his preseason showing.

Two speedy, unheralded Fassel favorites, David Patten and Omar Douglas, figure to battle for the fifth or sixth receiver spot.

Former Charger Al Pupunu has the inside track at tight end as Fassel looks to get that position more involved in the passing game. But if the line needs help blocking, as it did much of last year, Howard Cross will be called upon again.

LINE—The team focused on the skill positions in free agency and the draft, so the line will have to improve from within. After a horrendous start last season, it stabilized toward the end and dominated several opponents on the ground. The question now is whether there is much more upside to the unheralded unit.

The biggest surprise last year was left tackle Roman Oben, who went from a question in August to dominating John Randle in the playoffs in December. If he continues developing at this pace, Oben soon will be one of the best in the league.

The other tackle is massive Scott Gragg, who came close to losing his job early last season but held on and improved. He is far from entrenched, but the team believes he can get much better as he matures.

Other than right guard Ron Stone, there are concerns up the middle, particularly in a division with defensive tackles such as Dana Stubblefield, Dan Wilkinson, Leon Lett and Eric Swann. Lance Scott did a fine job as an emergency fill-in at center last season, but he is no star. Left guard Greg Bishop has had an up-and-down career as a Giant and is not a fan favorite.

Pushing Scott, Bishop and Gragg should be utilityman Jerry Reynolds, who has not played much as a pro. Guard/tackle Rob Zatechka also could push for playing time.

Fifth-round pick Toby Myles, a natural left tackle, provides depth, but should need a couple of years to develop.

DEFENSE

LINE—This was the most surprising unit on the team last season, totaling 41½ sacks. Thought to be just average, it now is viewed as a strength. The leader is left end Michael Strahan, who had 14 sacks in an All-Pro season. Strahan gives big, bulky offensive right tackles fits with his speed and moves.

The tackle duo of Robert Harris and Keith

New York Giants

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
18	Cherry, Mike	6-3/225	12-15-73	1	Murray State	D6/97	1/0
10	Graham, Kent	6-5/246	11-1-68	7	Ohio State	FA/98	8/6*
13	Kanell, Danny	6-3/215	11-21-73	3	Florida State	D4/96	16/10

Running Backs

21	Barber, Tiki	5-10/205	4-7-75	2	Virginia	D2/97	12/6
33	Brown, Gary	5-11/230	7-1-69	7	Penn State	FA/98	15/14*
23	Johnson, LeShon	6-0/207	1-15-71	5	Northern Illinois	FA/98	14/0*
37	Lane, Eric (FB)	6-2/240	3-17-74	2	Tennessee	FA/97	15/0
24	Walker, Robert	5-10/208	6-26-72	1	West Virginia	FA/96	0/0
30	Way, Charles (FB)	6-0/247	12-27-72	4	Virginia	D6b/95	16/16
28	Wheatley, Tyrone	6-0/230	1-19-72	4	Michigan	D1/95	14/7

Receivers

84	Alford, Brian	6-1/187	6-7-75	R	Purdue	D3/98	—
80	Calloway, Chris	5-10/191	3-29-68	9	Michigan	PlanB/92	16/16
87	Cross, Howard (TE)	6-5/270	8-8-67	10	Alabama	D6/89	16/16
82	Douglas, Omar	5-10/180	6-3-72	5	Minnesota	FA/94	0/0
19	Goines, Eddie	6-0/186	8-16-72	3	North Carolina State	D6b/95	0/0
88	Hilliard, Ike	5-11/190	4-5-76	2	Florida	D1/97	2/2
	Jessie, Brandon (TE)	6-6/260	5-20-74	2	Utah	FA/97	0/0
86	Jurevicius, Joe	6-5/231	12-23-74	R	Penn State	D2/98	—
83	Patten, David	5-9/180	8-19-74	2	Western Carolina	FA/97	16/3
89	Pollack, Todd (TE)	6-4/241	12-10-74	R	Boston College	D6/98	—
85	Pupunu, Alfred (TE)	6-2/260	10-17-69	7	Weber State	FA/98	9/1*
81	Toomer, Amani	6-3/202	9-8-74	3	Michigan	D2/96	16/0

Offensive Linemen

78	Bishop, Greg (G)	6-5/315	5-2-71	6	Pacific	D4/93	16/16
69	Engler, Derek (C)	6-5/300	7-11-74	2	Wisconsin	FA/97	5/5
54	Fricke, Ben (C)	6-0/282	11-13-75	R	Houston	D7/98	—
74	Gragg, Scott (T)	6-8/325	2-28-72	4	Montana	D2/95	16/16
70	Myles, Toby (T)	6-4/313	7-23-75	R	Jackson State	D5/98	—
72	Oben, Roman (T)	6-4/310	10-9-72	3	Louisville	D3/96	16/16
66	Reynolds, Jerry (T)	6-6/325	4-2-70	5	UNLV	FA/95	5/0
70	Scott, Lance (C)	6-3/285	2-15-72	4	Utah	D5/95	16/11
60	Stoltzenberg, Bryan (C)	6-1/293	8-25-72	3	Colorado	D6b/96	3/0
65	Stone, Ron (G)	6-5/325	7-20-71	6	Boston College	FA/96	16/16
73	Zatechka, Rob (G/T)	6-4/320	12-1-71	4	Nebraska	D4/95	16/0

Defensive Linemen

77	Bratzke, Chad (E)	6-4/285	9-15-71	5	Eastern Kentucky	D5/94	10/10
75	Hamilton, Keith (T)	6-6/295	5-25-71	7	Pittsburgh	D4/92	16/16
97	Harris, Robert (T)	6-4/295	6-13-69	7	Southern	FA/95	16/16
79	Holsey, Bernard (E)	6-2/295	12-10-73	3	Duke	FA/96	16/4
94	Jones, Cedric (E)	6-4/285	4-30-74	3	Oklahoma	D1/96	9/2
99	Peter, Christian (T)	6-3/300	10-5-72	2	Nebraska	FA/96	7/0
92	Strahan, Michael (E)	6-4/285	11-21-71	6	Texas Southern	D2/93	16/16

Linebackers

98	Armstead, Jessie	6-1/232	10-26-70	6	Miami (Fla.)	D8/93	16/16
55	Buckley, Marcus	6-3/240	2-3-71	6	Texas A&M	D3/93	12/3
58	Colman, Doug	6-2/250	6-4-73	3	Nebraska	D6a/96	14/0
52	Galyon, Scott	6-2/245	3-23-74	3	Tennessee	D6b/96	16/0
57	Miller, Corey	6-2/248	10-25-68	8	South Carolina	D6/91	14/13
51	Monty, Pete	6-2/250	7-13-74	2	Wisconsin	D4/97	3/0
91	Phillips, Ryan	6-4/252	2-7-74	2	Idaho	D3a/97	10/0
90	Widmer, Corey	6-3/255	12-25-68	7	Montana State	D7/92	16/15

Defensive Backs

43	Ellsworth, Percy (S)	6-2/220	10-19-74	2	Virginia	FA/96	16/1
20	Garnes, Sam (S)	6-3/220	7-12-74	2	Cincinnati	D5/97	16/15
41	Hamilton, Conrad (CB)	5-10/195	11-5-74	3	Eastern New Mexico	D7/96	14/0
44	Massey, Robert (CB)	5-11/208	2-17-67	10	North Carolina Central	FA/96	16/0
44	McMullen, Typail (S)	6-2/190	9-3-73	2	Middle Tennessee	FA/97	0/0
34	Sanders, Brandon (S)	5-9/185	6-10-73	2	Arizona	FA/97	12/0
31	Sehorn, Jason (CB)	6-2/210	4-15-71	5	USC	D2b/94	16/16
22	Sparks, Phillippi (CB)	5-11/195	4-15-69	7	Arizona State	D2/92	13/13
36	Williams, Shaun (S)	6-2/204	10-10-76	R	UCLA	D1/98	—
29	Wooten, Tito (S)	6-0/195	12-12-71	5	Northeast Louisiana	SupD4/94	16/16
47	Young, Rodney (S)	6-1/210	1-25-73	4	LSU	D3/95	9/0

Specialists


3	Daluiso, Brad (K)	6-2/215	12-31-67	8	UCLA	FA/93	16/0
9	Maynard, Brad (P)	6-1/185	2-9-74	2	Ball State	D3b/97	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Hunter Adams, DT; Ben Anderson, QB; Corey Bailey, C; Raphael Ball, CB; Jimmie Bell, DE; Kory Blackwell, CB; Will Brice, P; Greg Comella, FB; Charles Estes, DE; Darryl Gilliam, OT; Andy Haase, TE; Nathan Hobgood-Chittick, DT; Rashee Johnson, S; Marc Lamb, C; Jason Nevadomsky, LB; Chris Snyder, DE; Greg Studdard, OT; John Washington, WR; Jason Whittle, OT; George Williams, DE; Marcel Willis, LB.

*—Not with Giants in 1997.

GIANTS



New York OFFENSE

WR Calloway Jurevicius

WR Wheatley Barber

QB (QB) Kanell Graham
(C) Scott Engler

TE Pupunu Cross

FB Way Comella

K: Daluiso
P: Maynard
KR: Sehorn/Patten
PR: Barber

LT Oben Myles

LG Bishop Reynolds

C Stone Zatechka

RG Gragg Reynolds

RT Hilliard Alford

CB Sehorn C. Hamilton

RE Bratzke Jones

RT K. Hamilton Holsey

LT Harris Peter

LE Strahan Holsey

CB Sparks C. Hamilton

Armstead Galyon

WLB Wooten Ellsworth

MLB Widmer Monty

SS Garnes Williams

SLB Miller Buckley

Probable starters listed on top

New York DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Gary Brown, RB (FA/Chargers); Kent Graham, QB (FA/Cardinals); LeShon Johnson, RB (FA/Cardinals); Al Pupunu, TE (FA/Chargers).

Key losses: Ray Agnew, DT (FA/Rams); Dave Brown, QB (released/Cardinals); Rodney Hampton, RB (released); Thomas Lewis, WR (FA/Bears); Eric Pegram, RB (FA); Aaron Pierce, TE (released); Thomas Randolph, CB (FA/Bengals); Brian Williams, C (retired).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Shaun Williams	S	UCLA
2nd	Joe Jurevicius	WR	Penn State
3rd	Brian Alford	WR	Purdue
5th	Toby Myles	T	Jackson State
6th	Todd Pollack	TE	Boston College
7th	Ben Fricke	C	Houston

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	None	
1994	WR Thomas Lewis	Reserve with Bears
1995	RB Tyrone Wheatley	Starter with Giants
1996	DE Cedric Jones	Reserve with Giants
1997	WR Ike Hilliard	Starter with Giants

Coaching Staff

Coach: Jim Fassel. **Offensive staff:** Rod Dowhower (quarterbacks) • Mike Gillhamer (offensive assistant) • John Matsko (offensive line) • Dick Rehbein (tight ends/assistant offensive line) • Jim Skipper (offensive coordinator/running backs). **Defensive staff:** Dave Brazil (defensive quality control) • John Fox (defensive coordinator) • Mike Haluchak (linebackers) • Johnnie Lynn (defensive backs) • Denny Marcini (defensive line). **Others:** John Dunn (strength and condition-

ing) • Larry Mac Duff (special teams) • Craig Stoddard (assistant strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 10-5-1 (1st in NFC East); 7-0-1 in division; 9-2-1 in conference; 6-2 at home; 4-3-1 on road.

1997 playoff record: Lost to Vikings, 23-22, in NFC wild-card game.

Fassel's regular-season record: 10-5-1 in one season with Giants.

Fassel's postseason record: 0-1 in one appearance with Giants.

Team record past five years: 41-38-1 (.519, ranks T12th in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1996.

1997 team rankings	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*282.1	13	27
Rushing offense	*124.3	3	7
Passing offense	*157.8	14	28
Scoring offense	307	8	21
Total defense	*316.7	12	18
Rushing defense	*90.7	2	3
Passing defense	*226	14	26
Scoring defense	265	T2	T3
Takeaways	44	1	1
Giveaways	19	1	1
Turnover differential	25	1	1
Sacks	54	T3	T3
Sacks allowed	32	T2	T5

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

In the takeaway/giveaway game, no team in the league was better than the Giants last season.

Team	Takeaways	Giveaways	Net diff.
N.Y. Giants	44	19	+25
San Francisco	41	20	+21
Kansas City	34	20	+14
Denver	31	21	+10
New England	32	22	+10
Jacksonville	29	20	+9
St. Louis	39	30	+9
Miami	27	20	+7
Tennessee	31	26	+5
Minnesota	27	22	+5

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	WASHINGTON	1:01
Sept. 13	at Oakland	1:15
Sept. 21	DALLAS (Mon.)	8:20
Sept. 27	at San Diego	1:15
Oct. 4	at Tampa Bay	4:15
Oct. 11	ATLANTA	8:20
Oct. 18	ARIZONA	1:01
Oct. 25	Open date	
Nov. 1	at Washington	1:01
Nov. 8	at Dallas	12:01
Nov. 15	GREEN BAY	4:15
Nov. 22	PHILADELPHIA	1:01
Nov. 30	at San Francisco (Mon.)	5:20
Dec. 6	at Arizona	2:05
Dec. 13	DENVER	1:01
Dec. 20	KANSAS CITY	1:01
Dec. 27	at Philadelphia	4:05

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 18TH

1997 Results

Aug. 31	PHILADELPHIA	W	31-17
Sept. 7	at Jacksonville	L	13-40
Sept. 14	BALTIMORE	L	23-24
Sept. 21	at St. Louis	L	3-13
Sept. 28	NEW ORLEANS	W	14-9
Oct. 5	DALLAS	W	20-17
Oct. 12	at Arizona	W	27-13
Oct. 19	at Detroit (OT)	W	26-20
Oct. 26	CINCINNATI	W	29-27
Nov. 2	Open date		
Nov. 9	at Tennessee	L	6-10
Nov. 16	ARIZONA	W	19-10
Nov. 23	at Washington (OT)	T	7-7
Nov. 30	TAMPA BAY	L	8-20
Dec. 7	at Philadelphia	W	31-21
Dec. 13	WASHINGTON	W	30-10
Dec. 21	at Dallas	W	20-7
Dec. 27	MINNESOTA*	L	22-23

*NFC wild-card game.

Miscellaneous

President: Wellington T. Mara.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Giants (78,148, artificial).

Ticket information: 201-935-8222.

Flagship radio station: WNEW-FM, 102.7.

Training site: State University of New York at Albany, Albany, N.Y.; 201-935-8111.



ED NESSEN / TSN

Hamilton, two converted ends, emerged in '97 with fine work against the run and the pass. Harris, one of the team's best athletes, used his speed to compile 10 sacks.

The only question mark is at right end, where Chad Bratzke and 1996 first-round pick Cedric Jones are coming off serious knee injuries. Bratzke has held off Jones two years in a row and looked great in minicamp, but Jones again will be given a chance to overcome his image as a bust. He showed some flashes in two late-season starts last year in place of Bratzke.

Bernard Holsey, forced to move to end because of the injuries, likely will return to tackle as a backup now that Ray Agnew has left as a free agent. The team hopes second-year pro Christian Peter also can step up and serve as a backup tackle after a disappointing season.

LINEBACKERS—Weakside 'backer Jessie Armstead, a first-time Pro Bowl selection last season, is the team's most valuable player and its most influential leader. He plays every down, set a team record with 134 tackles last season and even pitched in on special teams. Beside him in the middle is Corey Widmer, a solid run-stuffer who comes out in most passing situations.

The big question mark is on the strongside, where Corey Miller is back after accepting a pay cut. He's a solid player and a good locker-room presence, but he made few impact plays last season and did not participate on passing downs. Battling Miller are Marcus Buckley and Ryan Phillips. Buckley is a five-year veteran who has had a lackluster career but has the speed to help in coverage; Phillips is a pass-rushing specialist who must work on his coverage skills.

Scott Galyon did an excellent job as the nickel linebacker last season and would be good enough to challenge for a regular job on the weakside if the Giants didn't have a star in that spot. And if he bounces back well from a torn ACL, second-year man Pete Monty might push Widmer in the middle.

SECONDARY—There were some breakdowns last season, but this remains a strength and the talent level was boosted further by the addition of first-round pick Shaun Williams. He is likely to play mostly in nickel packages, covering slot receivers, but also will push returning safeties Tito Wooten, Sam Garnes and Percy Ellsworth.

Wooten is the quarterback of the secondary and a smart player, in contrast to his history of off-field problems. Garnes' specialty is run support, while Ellsworth has come in on passing downs and has a nose for the ball and for making big plays.

Cornerback Jason Sehorn is the best athlete on the team and maybe in the entire league. Few teams even bother to throw in his direction, yet he led the team with six interceptions and 20 passes defended. He and Phillippi Sparks form one of the best cornerback combos in the NFL, especially in run support.

Losing Thomas Randolph to free agency will hurt the depth at cor-

ner, but Conrad Hamilton is a capable third cornerback as long as he avoids the damaging penalties that plagued him last season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The staff is emphasizing improvement in the return games, especially the horrendous kickoff returns that were a problem throughout last season. Fassel is not sure who will be deep on kickoffs, but he is considering using Sehorn at times despite the risk of injury, as well as Patten.

Toomer has had his moments returning punts—three touchdowns in his first two seasons—but Barber has the inside track for that role in 1998.

Kicker Brad Daluiso recovered from an awful early-season slump last season to finish well. He still has one of the league's strongest legs, so the team re-signed him as an unrestricted free agent. Punter Brad Maynard, a third-round pick last year, was a disappointment and must show the coaches more consistency.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The bad news is the schedule is a minefield of some of the league's best teams, including the Broncos, Packers, 49ers, Chiefs and Buccaneers. The good news is the toughest stretch is later in the season, so the team will have a chance to get its feet wet during a relatively soft start.

With three NFC East home games, plus the Raiders, Chargers and Falcons before the Week 8 bye, the Giants better be at least 5-2 to be in position to bid for a playoff berth, as the final two months have to be the most difficult for any team in the NFL.

Another complication: The team plays four games in the far west, including back-to-back against the 49ers on a Monday night and the Cardinals on Sunday. The players will spend the week in Arizona rather than return home.

BOTTOM LINE

The Giants might be better this season than last—but with a worse record. If they want to be among the NFL's big boys again, they must prove they can compete with them.

If the defense holds up and if Kanell and the offense take a big step, there is no reason the Giants can't manage 9-7 or slightly better and sneak back into the playoffs. But the margin for error is much slimmer than a year ago.

Fassel should prevent a big step backward, but do not be surprised by a small one, to 8-8. Still, a second-place finish is possible. **TSN**

Neil Best covers the Giants for Newsday.

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	A
Offensive backfield:	B
Offensive line:	C+
Receivers:	C
Defensive line:	A-
Linebackers:	B+
Secondary:	A-
Special teams:	B-

Armstead did it all for the Giants last season, when he led the team in tackles with 134 and was chosen for his first Pro Bowl.



Eagles may have kept up with Dallas, but other teams have passed them

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 5th

BY MARK ECKEL

Ray Rhodes' goal when he took over the Eagles was to catch, and eventually pass, the Dallas Cowboys. Last year, Rhodes' third season, the team accomplished that feat as it finally overtook the slumping Cowboys.

While Rhodes and the organization had tunnel vision in overtaking Dallas, the Giants and Redskins passed them. The Eagles finished 6-9-1 last season, their worst record since going 5-10-1 in 1986, although it was a half-game better than the 6-10 Cowboys.

Now, with the Cardinals arguably the most improved team in the league and the Giants and Redskins at least as good, if not better, than they were last season, the Eagles' battle with the Cowboys might be to stay out of the NFC East cellar.

"I think if you look at our division, it has really improved," Rhodes said. "We took some steps back the past year; the whole division did. I don't think there was any question that the NFC Central was the best (division). But I think after this offseason, with the moves that were made, the East will be right back up there."

The problem for Rhodes and Co. is their only key additions came by way of a Bill Parcells yard sale, as defensive end Hugh Douglas and wide receiver Jeff Graham were picked up in a trade for a combined four draft picks.

This season, the Eagles may struggle to equal last year's mark. And if they do, they may find themselves back behind the Cowboys—and in last place for the first time since 1984.

COACHING

Rhodes has gone from Coach of the Year in 1995 to a coach on the hot seat in '98. If the Eagles regress again this season, there is no guarantee Rhodes will be back for the final year of his five-year contract in 1999.

Since a wild-card win over Detroit in his first year, Rhodes is 16-17-1; he's 9-14-1 in his past 24 games. That's certainly not good enough, or what owner Jeffrey Lurie expected when he promised Eagles fans "championships."

Rhodes has surrounded himself with an inexperienced staff, at least in terms of NFL experience. Only defensive coordinator Emmitt Thomas and linebacker coach Joe Vitt spent any lengthy time in the league before they were hired by Rhodes. The rest of the staff has come from the college ranks, and it has shown.

Three notable changes were made on this year's staff. Dana Bible, whose Stanford offense ranked eighth in the Pac-10 last year, replaced offensive coordinator Jon Gruden, who became the Raiders' coach. But if you can't solve the UCLA defense, are you going to be able to figure out the Giants? Bible plans to keep the principles of the West Coast offense that Gruden used the past three years.

Juan Castillo was promoted from tight ends coach, after his three tight ends combined for 33 receptions last year, to offensive line coach. Last year, the offensive line allowed 64 sacks, second-most in the league and third-most in team history.

John Harbaugh, the brother of Ravens' quarterback Jim, becomes the Eagles third special teams coach in as many years. Harbaugh, a former Indiana assistant, brings intelligence and intensity, but it's questionable if he has the ingredients to work with.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Bobby Hoving, who had an emergency appendectomy in April, then was readmitted to the hospital when an infection formed a week later, heads to camp as the starter after a brief six-game trial last season that included a 2-3-1 record and an impressive



Hoving did a nice job in his six late-season starts. This year will go a long way in determining if he's the long-term answer at quarterback.

11 touchdown passes to six interceptions. This is an important season for Hoving, a third-year pro from Ohio State who will be a restricted free agent at the end of the season. He will play this year for a base salary of \$246,000, by far the lowest of any starting quarterback.

Former starter Rodney Peete returns as Hoving's backup/mentor. He might be the NFC's top No. 2 guy.

Last year's opening-day starter, Ty Detmer, bolted for the 49ers as a free agent. But he left brother Koy behind as the No. 3 man.

RUNNING BACKS—After three years, 3,794 rushing yards and 32 touchdowns, Ricky Watters wasn't offered a new contract and signed as a free agent with the Seahawks. That leaves the trio of Charlie Garner, Duce Staley and fullback Kevin Turner to try to account for Watters' productions.

Garner, who can be electrifying, never has carried more than 116 times in a season and doesn't possess Watters' skills as a receiver. In addition, you have to wonder how much his 5-9, 180-pound body can take. Staley spent his rookie season primarily on special teams. The organization thinks he's another Edgar Bennett. They better be right. Every year, we are told that Turner is going to get more involved in the offense, but every year, he becomes more of an extra blocker because of an inept line.

Former Bengals starter Jeff Cothran has a good chance to win a backup spot at fullback. Free-agent rookie Brian McKenzie, out of BYU, also might stick.

RECEIVERS—The team hopes to squeeze another Pro Bowl season out of Irving Fryar. This isn't meant to scare anyone, but the produc-

tion of Washington's Henry Ellard went from 52 receptions for 1,014 yards in 1996 to 32 for 485 last year at age 36 in his 15th season. This will be the soon-to-be 36-year-old Fryar's 15th season.

In the offseason, Chris T. Jones, who missed almost all of his third season with knee problems, had knee surgery for a third time. His health was such a concern the team traded for Graham, who came out of Parcells' doghouse to catch just 16 passes over the final eight games of last season. Graham will be a one-year stopgap, since he is scheduled to earn \$5 million if he is on the roster next year.

Antwuan Wyatt, who spent all but the first game of his rookie season on injured reserve, will battle Mr. Clutch, Freddie Solomon (25 of his 29 receptions last year went for a first down or touchdown), for a back-up spot, as will undrafted rookie Harvey Middleton, who set school records at Georgia Tech.

Jim Bollman, formerly of Michigan State, will become the tight ends coach; that means his main focus will be to try to get Jason Dunn's unlimited potential to surface. If Dunn falters, look for second-year man Chad Lewis to emerge. Lewis, who made the team as an undrafted free agent last year, has good hands and knows how to get open. If he improves his blocking, he could unseat Dunn in a hurry. Jimmie Johnson returns as an insurance policy against the two unpredictable young guys.

LINE—Rookie Tra Thomas, the team's No. 1 pick from Florida State, will be the Eagles' eighth left tackle in the '90s. He will replace 1996 first-round pick Jermaine Mayberry, who led the league in sacks allowed (15½ of the team's 64) and the team in penalties (12 for 80 yards) last season. Mayberry will be moved inside and battle free-agent signees Keith Sims (Redskins) and George Hegamin (Cowboys) for the two guard spots; Hegamin also can play tackle. Ian Beckles, who was bothered by a foot injury the second half of last year, also could be in the picture at guard if healthy.

Center Steve Everitt signed a five-year, \$11.25 million contract last year and was a major disappointment on and off the field. He was convicted on a DWI charge and lost his driver's license. Critics point out he never drove anyone on the field, either.

Richard Cooper, who spent last year on injured reserve with a torn triceps, will be back at right tackle. Barrett Brooks, a three-year starter at both tackle positions, accepted the team's one-year offer and will be a backup until he becomes an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season.

DEFENSE

LINE—The Eagles could have drafted Douglas in 1995; instead, they traded up and took Mike Mamula. Now they have both.

The pass-rushing duo had four sacks each last season. Douglas had an excuse for his low production, as he was out of place in the Jets' 3-4 defense. Mamula, who continues to look like a 3-4 linebacker, also may be out of place as an end. But the Eagles refuse to admit they erred on the seventh pick of the 1995 draft. This year, Rhodes says he will line up the 250-pound Mamula on the left side, with the 6-1, 265-pound Douglas on the right side. Believe it when you see it.

Jon Harris, the team's 1997 first-round pick, was supposed to bulk up during the offseason but looked the same at minicamp as he did last season. He may

Philadelphia Eagles

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
10	Detmer, Koy	6-0/180	7-5-73	2	Colorado	D7a/97	0/0
7	Hoying, Bobby	6-3/221	9-20-72	2	Ohio State	D3/96	7/6
9	Peete, Rodney	6-0/225	3-16-66	10	USC	FA/95	5/3

Running Backs

33	Cothran, Jeff (FB)	6-1/249	6-28-71	4	Ohio State	FA/98	0/0*
30	Garner, Charlie	5-9/187	2-13-72	5	Tennessee	D2b/94	16/2
22	Staley, Duce	5-11/220	2-27-75	2	South Carolina	D3/97	16/0
34	Turner, Kevin (FB)	6-1/231	6-12-69	7	Alabama	FA/95	16/10
29	Walker, Corey	5-10/188	6-4-73	2	Arkansas State	FA/97	0/0

Receivers

86	Copeland, Russell	6-0/200	11-4-71	6	Memphis State	FA/97	0/0
87	Dunn, Jason (TE)	6-4/257	11-15-73	3	Eastern Kentucky	D2a/96	15/4
80	Fryar, Irving	6-0/200	9-28-62	15	Nebraska	FA/96	16/16
81	Graham, Jeff	6-2/206	2-14-69	8	Ohio State	T-NYJ/98	16/16*
41	Hickman, Kevin (TE)	6-4/258	8-20-71	3	Navy	FA/98	4/0*
88	Johnson, Jimmie (TE)	6-2/257	10-6-66	10	Howard	FA/95	16/11
82	Jones, Chris T.	6-3/209	8-7-71	4	Miami (Fla.)	D3b/95	4/1
89	Lewis, Chad (TE)	6-6/252	10-5-71	2	Brigham Young	FA/97	16/3
84	Solomon, Freddie	5-10/180	8-15-72	3	South Carolina State	FA/97	15/5
85	Wyatt, Antwuan	5-10/199	7-18-75	2	Bethune-Cookman	D6a/97	1/0

Offensive Linemen

62	Beckles, Ian (G)	6-1/304	7-20-67	9	Indiana	FA/97	9/8
76	Brooks, Barrett (T)	6-4/309	5-5-72	4	Kansas State	D2b/95	16/14
77	Cooper, Richard (T)	6-5/290	11-1-64	9	Tennessee	FA/96	0/0
66	Crafts, Jerry (T/G)	6-5/334	1-6-68	5	Louisville	FA/97	15/6
61	Everitt, Steve (C)	6-5/290	8-21-70	6	Michigan	FA/97	16/16
69	Hegamin, George (T/G)	6-7/331	2-14-73	5	North Carolina State	FA/98	13/9*
64	Love, Sean (G)	6-3/305	9-6-68	5	Penn State	FA/97	0/0
71	Mayberry, Jermaine (T)	6-4/325	8-29-73	3	Texas A&M-Kingsville	D1/96	16/16
65	Miller, Bubba (C)	6-1/300	1-24-73	3	Tennessee	FA/96	13/3
67	Sims, Keith (G)	6-3/318	6-17-67	9	Iowa State	FA/98	8/4*
75	Thomas, Melvin (G)	6-3/322	6-11-75	R	Colorado	D7b/98	—
72	Thomas, Tra (T)	6-7/349	11-20-74	R	Florida State	D1/98	—
68	Unutoa, Morris (C)	6-1/284	3-10-71	3	Brigham Young	FA/96	16/0

Defensive Linemen

93	Akins, Chris (T)	6-1/323	1-7-76	R	Texas	D7a/98	—
53	Douglas, Hugh (E)	6-2/280	8-23-71	4	Central State (Ohio)	T-NYJ/98	15/15*
97	Hall, Rhett (T)	6-2/276	12-5-68	8	California	FA/95	15/15
90	Harris, Jon (E)	6-7/280	6-9-74	2	Virginia	D1/97	8/4
74	Jasper, Edward (T)	6-2/295	1-18-73	2	Texas A&M	D6b/97	9/1
79	Jefferson, Greg (E)	6-3/257	8-31-71	4	Central Florida	D3a/95	12/11
94	Johnson, Bill (T)	6-4/305	12-9-68	7	Michigan State	FA/98	16/16*
58	Kalu, Ndukwe (E)	6-3/246	8-3-75	2	Rice	D5a/97	3/0
78	Thomas, Hollis (T)	6-0/306	1-10-74	3	Northern Illinois	FA/96	16/16
98	Whiting, Brandon (T)	6-3/278	7-30-76	R	California	D4a/98	—

Linebackers

56	Caldwell, Mike	6-2/237	8-31-71	6	Middle Tennessee State	FA/98	16/0*
57	Darling, James	6-0/250	12-29-74	2	Washington State	D2/97	16/6
55	Farmer, Ray	6-3/225	7-1-74	3	Duke	D4/96	14/5
52	Fogle, DeShawn	6-1/220	4-1-75	2	Kansas State	FA/97	5/0
59	Mamula, Mike	6-4/252	8-14-73	4	Boston College	D1/95	16/16
49	Reese, Ike	6-2/222	10-16-73	R	Michigan State	D5/98	—
51	Thomas, William	6-2/223	8-13-68	8	Texas A&M	D4/91	14/14
54	Trotter, Jeremiah	6-0/261	1-20-77	R	Stephen F. Austin	D3a/98	—
96	Wallace, Al	6-5/258	3-25-74	1	Maryland	FA/97	1/0
50	Willis, James	6-2/237	9-2-72	6	Auburn	FA/95	15/15

Defensive Backs


27	Brice, Alundis (CB)	5-10/178	5-1-70	3	Mississippi	FA/98	0/0*
20	Dawkins, Brian (S)	5-11/190	10-13-73	3	Clemson	D2b/96	15/15
47	Emanuel, Charles (S)	6-0/196	6-3-73	2	West Virginia	FA/97	5/1
43	Kinder, Randy (S)	6-1/210	4-4-75	2	Notre Dame	W-GB/97	6/0
28	Love, Clarence (CB)	5-10/181	6-16-76	R	Toledo	D4b/98	—
24	McTyer, Tim (CB)	5-11/181	12-14-75	2	Brigham Young	FA/97	10/0
26	Rice, Anthony (CB)	5-9/185	11-29-73	1	La Verne	FA/97	0/0
25	Rossum, Allen (CB)	5-8/178	10-22-75	R	Notre Dame	D3/98	—
45	Stevens, Matt (S)	6-0/206	6-15-73	3	Appalachian State	W-Buf/97	11/0
21	Taylor, Bobby (CB)	6-3/216	12-28-73	4	Notre Dame	D2a/95	6/5
23	Vincent, Troy (CB)	6-0/194	6-8-70	7	Wisconsin	FA/96	16/16
36	Zordich, Michael (S)	6-1/212	10-12-63	12	Penn State	FA/94	16/16

Specialists

18	Bonioli, Chris (K)	5-11/167	12-9-71	4	Louisiana Tech	FA/97	16/0
2	Holmes, Jaret (P)	6-2/209	3-3-76	R	Auburn	FA/98	—
4	Hutton, Tom (P)	6-1/193	7-8-72	4	Tennessee	FA/95	16/0

Specialists

Troy Asbell, LB; Rico Cannon, WR; Keith Council, DT; Tarren Crawford, G; Josh Dolbin, WR; Jason Dulick, WR; John Fisher, FS; Karl Hankton, WR; A.J. Jelks, FB; Tevell Jones, CB; Keith Kerrin, LB; Pat Kesi, G; Excel Lucas, CB; Mike McCoy, QB; Brian McKenzie, RB; Harvey Middleton, WR; Mike Reed, FB; Kaseem Sinceno, TE; Matt Storm, G; Sheddric Wilson, WR.
*—Not with Eagles in 1997.



Philadelphia OFFENSE

Garner Staley (RB)

Turner Cothran (FB)

K: Boniol
P: Hutton
KR: Rossum, Wyatt
PR: Rossum, Wyatt

Fryar Solomon (WR)

T. Thomas Brooks (LT)

Sims Beckles (LG)

(QB) Hoying Peete
(C) Everitt Miller

Mayberry Beckles (RG)

Cooper Hegamin (RT)

Dunn Lewis (TE)

Graham Jones (WR)

Taylor McTyer (CB)

Douglas Jefferson (RE)

Hall H. Thomas (RT)

Johnson Jasper (LT)

Mamula Harris (LE)

Vincent Brice (CB)

Probable starters listed on top

W. Thomas Farmer (RLB)

Dawkins Emanuel (FS)

Willis Trotter (MLB)

Zordich Stevens (SS)

Darling Caldwell (LLB)

Philadelphia DEFENSE

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Mike Caldwell, LB (FA/Cardinals); Jeff Cothran, FB (FA/Bengals); Hugh Douglas, DE (trade/Jets); Jeff Graham, WR (trade/Jets); George Hegamin, G/T (FA/Cowboys); Bill Johnson, DT (FA/Rams); Keith Sims, G (FA/Dolphins).
Key losses: Willie Clark, CB (FA/Rams); Richard Dent, DE (retired); Ty Detmer, QB (FA/49ers); Joe Panos, G (FA/Bills); Darrin Smith, LB (FA/Seahawks); Ricky Watters, RB (FA/Seahawks).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Tra Thomas	T	Florida State
3rd	Jeremiah Trotter	LB	Stephen F. Austin
3rd	Allen Rossum	CB	Notre Dame
4th	Brandon Whiting	DT	California
4th	Clarence Love	CB	Toledo
5th	Ike Reese	LB	Michigan State
7th	Chris Akins	DT	Texas
7th	Melvin Thomas	G	Colorado

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	G Lester Holmes	Starter with Cardinals
	DT Leonard Renfro	Out of football
1994	OT Bernard Williams	Out of football
1995	DE Mike Mamula	Starter with Eagles
1996	G Jermaine Mayberry	Starter with Eagles
1997	DE Jon Harris	Backup with Eagles

Coaching Staff

Coach: Ray Rhodes. **Offensive staff:** Dana Bible (offensive coordinator) • Jim Bollman (tight ends) • Gerald Carr (wide receivers) • Juan Castillo (offensive line) • Sean Payton (quarterbacks) • Ted Williams (running backs) • Ken Zampesi

(offensive assistant). **Defensive staff:** Chuck Knox Jr. (defensive assistant) • Danny Smith (defensive backs) • Emmitt Thomas (defensive coordinator) • Mike Trovac (defensive line) • Joe Vitt (linebackers). **Others:** John Harbaugh (special teams) • Tom Kanavy (assistant strength and coordinator) • Mike Wolf (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 6-9-1 (3rd in NFC East); 3-5 in division; 4-8 in conference; 6-2 at home; 0-7-1 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Rhodes' regular-season record: 26-21-1 in three seasons with Eagles.

Rhodes' postseason record: 1-2 in two appearances with Eagles.

Team record past five years: 41-38-1 (.519, ranks T12th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1996.

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*349.4	3	5
Rushing offense	*121.4	5	10
Passing offense	*227.9	2	6
Scoring offense	317	7	19
Total defense	*308.3	7	13
Rushing defense	*125.6	13	25
Passing defense	*182.7	5	7
Scoring defense	372	13	24
Takeaways	26	T10	T19
Giveaways	32	T10	T20
Turnover differential	-6	11	24
Sacks	43	T7	T13
Sacks allowed	64	14	29

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Last season, the Eagles' Chris Boniol became the NFL's career field-goal percentage leader.

Player	FGA	FGM	Pct.
Chris Boniol	103	124	83.06
Doug Pelfrey	116	144	80.56
John Carney	188	234	80.34
Pete Stoyanovich	219	273	80.22
Nick Lowery	383	479	79.96
John Kasay	167	209	79.90
Steve Christie	188	236	79.66
Matt Stover	153	193	79.27
Jason Hanson	139	176	78.98
Gary Anderson	385	490	78.57

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	SEATTLE	1:01
Sept. 13	at Atlanta	1:01
Sept. 20	at Arizona	5:20
Sept. 27	KANSAS CITY	1:01
Oct. 4	at Denver	2:15
Oct. 11	WASHINGTON	1:01
Oct. 18	at San Diego	1:15
Oct. 25	Open date	
Nov. 2	DALLAS (Mon.)	8:20
Nov. 8	DETROIT	1:01
Nov. 15	at Washington	1:01
Nov. 22	at N.Y. Giants	1:01
Nov. 29	at Green Bay	3:15
Dec. 3	ST. LOUIS (Thur.)	8:20
Dec. 13	ARIZONA	1:01
Dec. 20	at Dallas	3:15
Dec. 27	N.Y. GIANTS	4:05

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T11TH

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at N.Y. Giants	L	17-31
Sept. 7	GREEN BAY	W	10-9
Sept. 15	at Dallas	L	20-21
Sept. 21	Open date		
Sept. 28	at Minnesota	L	19-28
Oct. 5	WASHINGTON	W	24-10
Oct. 12	at Jacksonville	L	21-38
Oct. 19	ARIZONA (OT)	W	13-10
Oct. 26	DALLAS	W	13-12
Nov. 2	at Arizona	L	21-31
Nov. 10	SAN FRANCISCO	L	12-24
Nov. 16	at Baltimore (OT)	T	10-10
Nov. 23	PITTSBURGH	W	23-20
Nov. 30	CINCINNATI	W	44-42
Dec. 7	N.Y. GIANTS	L	21-31
Dec. 14	at Atlanta	L	17-20
Dec. 21	at Washington	L	32-35

Miscellaneous

Owner: Jeffrey Lurie.
Stadium (capacity, surface): Veterans (65,352, artificial).
Ticket information: 215-463-2500.
Flagship radio station: WYSP-FM, 94.1.
Training site: Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa.; 610-758-6868.



Fryar just keeps on keeping on. But age eventually will catch up to him, and if it happens this season, the Eagles will suffer at receiver.

JOHN DUNN FOR TSN

rotate at one of the end spots, along with last year's starting left end, Greg Jefferson.

Inside, the Eagles added run-stuffer *extraordinaire* Bill Johnson from the Rams to team with pass rusher Rhett Hall and run-stopper Hollis Thomas. Johnson, the Rams' best defensive lineman last season, led the league with 15 tackles for loss; that was twice as many as any Eagle. Hall is coming off a major knee injury suffered in the next-to-last game of 1997. He hopes to be ready for camp, but it's iffy. Thomas, who played well as a rookie, has tried to become like Green Bay's Gilbert Brown in more ways than one. His weight has become a problem the coaching staff doesn't need.

LINEBACKERS—This could be the team's strength if second-year man James Darling takes another step forward, William Thomas returns to Pro Bowl form and James Willis is stoked by the challenge of rookie Jeremiah Trotter.

Darling, who was moved outside last year, showed signs of being a player late last season. He needs to continue to improve and make his second-round selection in 1997 worth the price.

Thomas was bothered by various injuries last season and his play fell off from his Pro Bowl level of 1995 and '96. Willis, who has fought off challengers the past two years, will get another from Trotter, a third-round pick out of Division I-AA Stephen F. Austin.

The Eagles added depth by signing Mike Caldwell from the Cardinals and drafting Michigan State's Ike Reese in the fifth round. Second-year man Ray Farmer remains in the mix.

SECONDARY—Bobby Taylor, who needs to recover from knee surgery, and Troy Vincent, who played well in his second year as an Eagle, give the team a strong set of starting corners. That's where the

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	C-	Defensive line:	C-
Offensive backfield:	C+	Linebackers:	C+
Offensive line:	C	Secondary:	C
Receivers:	C	Special teams:	C

good news ends.

Unless former Cowboy Alundis Brice can return from a year out of football caused by two major knee injuries, there is no experienced nickel back on the roster. The team will let draft picks Allen Rossum, a third-rounder from Notre Dame, and speedy Clarence Love, a fourth-rounder from Toledo, fight for the job. If both fail, it could go to former practice-squadder Tim McTyler, who excelled on special teams a year ago.

Michael Zordich is supposed to be threatened by Matt Stevens at strong safety, but don't be surprised if Zordich, 34, wins the battle. Stevens, who was suspended for steroid use at the start of last season, seems more suited as a backup in the nickel and dime packages.

Brian Dawkins is another young player who slipped in his second year after a decent rookie season. It couldn't be the coaching staff, could it? In any case, Dawkins is a free safety with potential. Look for the Eagles to shop for veteran backups at corner and safety during camp.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Harbaugh takes over a unit that ranked in the bottom half of the league in every category except punt coverage. The special teams allowed 11 kickoff returns of at least 40 yards and were called for 29 penalties. Things should improve.

Randy Kinder, claimed on waivers from the Packers last season, McTyler, Stevens and Reese look like a good nucleus of cover men.

The return game should be bolstered by the addition of Rossum, who returned three kickoffs and three punts for touchdowns in college. Over the past 11 years, the Eagles have had just one punt return for a touchdown (Vai Sikahema in 1992).

Kicker Chris Boniol, a key free-agent addition last season, missed more field goals for the Eagles (nine) last season than he did in his final two seasons with the Cowboys (five). He needs to bounce back in a big way.

Punter Tom Hutton ranked 24th in the league in net average and 22nd in gross average. He also placed just 19 of his 87 punts inside the 20. Only the Rams' punters had a worse percentage. Rookie Jaret Holmes, thought to be one of the best college kickers in the country last year at Auburn, could take Hutton's job.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The Eagles face two of the league's most improved teams, the Seahawks and Cardinals, in the first three weeks, then play the Chiefs and Broncos in weeks four and five. That's not an easy start for a team that lost its last three games of 1997.

The team enters its bye week with a winnable game at San Diego, followed by home games against the Cowboys, on *Monday Night Football*, and the Lions. Then comes the toughest stretch: consecutive road games against the Redskins, Giants and Packers. Fortunately, the Redskin and Giant trips are just bus rides. But keep in mind that the Eagles were the league's only winless road team last season. Three of the final four games are at home, and the final three are against NFC East rivals.

BOTTOM LINE

The Eagles have made some good moves, but questions remain. That means they won't finish higher than fourth in the NFC East. **TSN**

Mark Eckel covers the Eagles for the Trenton (N.J.) Times.



'Skins hoping to 'share the wealth'—but 'spread the blame' may work, too

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 1st

BY PAUL WOODY

You'll be able to spread the credit for the Redskins' success—or failure—this season among a number of folks.

To wit: So much of the team's success this season depends upon quarterback Gus Frerotte. He has to improve on his performance of 1997, make better decisions and occasionally make plays that decide games in the Redskins' favor.

Much also depends on Dana Stubblefield and Dan Wilkinson. The Redskins made them wealthy young men this offseason. In return, they expect the two defensive tackles to make life miserable for opposing linemen, runners and quarterbacks.

So much also depends on Michael Westbrook, who has the potential to be a dominant NFL receiver but hasn't quite lived up to his advance billing. He must stay healthy and limit outside distractions.

And so much depends on coach Norv Turner. He has promised to stop begging his players to perform and start demanding that they do. That's not a bad idea. Turner has tried to cajole his charges into playing consistently well, especially in the latter portions of the season. But a few don't seem to listen, and the lack of attention to detail has been costly. A lack of such attention this year will be just as costly, especially in a division where every team, with the possible exception of Philadelphia, appears to be improved over last season.

Team owner John Kent Cooke has followed the tradition of his late father and poured millions into player signings and year-old Jack Kent Cooke Stadium. Now, he'd like to see a team worthy of such investments.

COACHING

Turner puts together solid offensive game plans. His play-calling is superior, a combination of imagination and creativity. But the Redskins have stumbled down the stretch for successive seasons and missed the playoffs. For whatever reason, Turner hasn't gotten the players to buy into the sense of "urgency" he constantly discusses with them. Playoff coaches either find a way to get that done or find players so talented that making the playoffs can't be avoided.

Defensive coordinator Mike Nolan brought a new system with him last season and the results were mixed. In some games, the Redskins' defense hung in well against quality offenses. In other games, it let inferior opponents run and complete crucial passes. The line has been upgraded and Nolan has top-drawer NFL players to do his work now. He'll need to find ways to get those linemen to pile up sacks, something that didn't happen in Nolan's last season with the Giants in '96 or with the Redskins in '97.

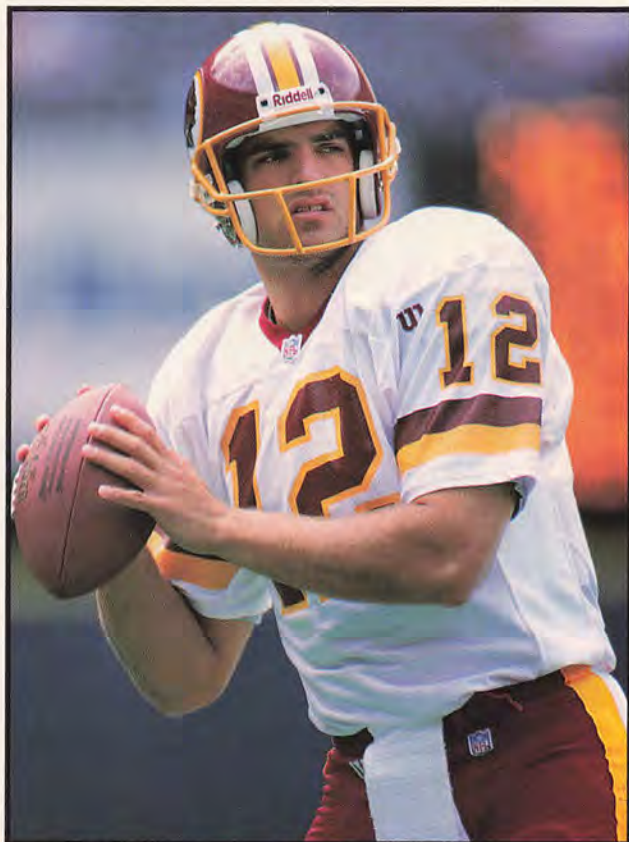
The Redskins have capable assistants, ranging from veterans (defensive line coach Earl Leggett is entering his 23rd NFL season) to youngsters (special teams coach LeCharles McDaniel is entering his first as a full-fledged assistant).

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Frerotte struggled last season in trying to live up to his new \$18 million contract. His season ended after game 13, when he suffered a broken hip early in the fourth quarter of a game against the Rams. Frerotte finished that game, and almost pulled out a victory. No one has questioned Frerotte's toughness, and no one should.

Frerotte has promised to enjoy football more this season, to have fun and not try to be the next John Elway every time he steps onto the field. He's capable of being a solid NFL quarterback. If he is, the Redskins will be fine on offense; if he isn't, trouble is ahead.

Jeff Hostetler took over after Frerotte's injury and led the team to two victories in three starts. Hostetler knows what he's doing, but he no longer seems to have the arm for some of the longer passes. Put him near the goal line, though, and Hostetler will find a way to get



The Redskins need Frerotte to play better than he did last season, when he struggled at times trying to live up to his big-money contract.

a touchdown. Hostetler might not be a quarterback you'd want for the long haul, but there's enough short-term quality left in him to make him valuable.

Trent Green is an unproven commodity as the No. 3 man.

RUNNING BACKS—Until last year, Terry Allen was a dream come true for the Redskins. He was tough, durable and productive. But three injuries cost him six games in 1997, and the Redskins weren't the same team without him. They're hoping '97 was an aberration and that Allen will be healthy—or as healthy as a running back with two reconstructed knees can be. If he's healthy, the Redskins' offense should thrive. If he isn't, there could be a problem.

Stephen Davis gained 567 yards last season but never had a 100-yard game and never seemed to gain the confidence of his blockers. Davis should be pushed this season by Skip Hicks, a third-round pick from UCLA. Hicks was productive, finishing his college career as the Bruins' career leader in touchdowns. Hicks also is a good receiver, although the Redskins have Brian Mitchell as their third-down back, and he's one of the best in the league.

Larry Bowie is a blocking fullback who has developed into a fine receiver. He has gotten better in each of his first two seasons, and this year should be no exception.

RECEIVERS—The Redskins want Westbrook to be their go-to guy, but he has yet to stay healthy for a season in any of his three years in the league. In addition, Westbrook has yet to catch more than 34 passes in a season.

Unheralded Leslie Shepherd is solid on the other side. He can find the seam in a zone to pick up first downs, and he can outrun most cornerbacks and safeties on deep routes.

In reserve are Albert Connell and James Thrash, both in their second years. Connell was productive in his five appearances last season, catching nine passes for 138 yards and two touchdowns. He should have the chance to be more productive this year. Thrash has the size, speed and hands to one day be a premier NFL receiver. He's probably several years away from that, though, and should be the fourth receiver this season.

The Redskins expect to get more from their tight ends this season, which is saying something since Jamie Asher led the team in receptions last season with 49. But the Redskins want more yards after the catch from Asher this season. The Redskins used their first pick, a second-round choice, to take Oklahoma tight end Stephen Alexander, who might be a bigger and faster version of Asher.

LINE—Not a single member of the line started every game in the same position last year, and it showed. Inconsistency was the line's hallmark, and it was a painful hallmark for a team that long has prided itself on top-quality line play.

Things should be different this year. Tre' Johnson, who missed all of the '97 exhibition season and the first three regular-season games (as well as the last two) because of shoulder problems, had surgery in the offseason. Johnson and the Redskins hope surgery corrected the problems and that he will be ready to go on the first day of camp. That's important, as Johnson is the most rugged—and outspoken—lineman, capable of setting the tone for his linemates.

The Redskins want to move Joe Patton from left tackle to right guard, and they might have found a way to do that. Brad Badger, a second-year player, looks to be athletic enough, big enough and confident enough to play left tackle. If so, Patton would move to Badger's right guard spot. If not, things will remain as they were last season.

Shar Pourdanesh showed last season that he is a solid right tackle, and he will be given a chance this year to show he can be that for 16 games.

Cory Raymer will start at center after waiting four years for the opportunity. Jeff Uhlenhake held the position last year until a knee injury put him on injured reserve. Uhlenhake had reconstructive surgery, and his recovery was hindered by an infection in the knee.

Depth is a concern. Badger and Pourdanesh were backups most of last season, but with Bob Dahl and Ed Simmons gone, the Redskins must develop some youngsters as backups. They hope Troy Drake, Ozell Powell and Michael Batiste are up to the task.

DEFENSE

LINE—Inadequate best describes Washington's line last season. It played hard but was unable to mount much of a pass rush or stop running games with any consistency. The Redskins have given themselves a chance to be good, though, by acquiring Wilkinson from Cincinnati and by signing Stubblefield, an unrestricted free agent who had 15 sacks for San Francisco last year.

Kenard Lang was coming on strong three games into his rookie season before he was sidelined by an ear infection so severe that surgery was required to correct it. He missed five games and lost 12 pounds. But he came back strong, started the final eight

Washington Redskins

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
12	Frerotte, Gus	6-2/240	7-31-71	5	Tulsa	D7/94	13/13
10	Green, Trent	6-3/215	7-9-70	5	Indiana	FA/95	1/0
15	Hostetler, Jeff	6-3/215	4-22-61	15	West Virginia	FA/97	8/3

Running Backs

21	Allen, Terry	5-10/208	2-21-68	9	Clemson	FA/95	10/10
47	Bowie, Larry (FB)	6-0/249	3-21-73	3	Georgia	FA/96	15/13
48	Davis, Stephen	6-0/234	3-1-74	3	Auburn	D4/96	14/6
40	Hicks, Skip	6-0/230	10-13-74	R	UCLA	D3/98	—
36	Maston, Le'Shai (FB)	6-1/242	10-7-70	6	Baylor	FA/98	0/0*
30	Mitchell, Brian (FB)	5-10/221	8-18-68	9	SW Louisiana	D5/90	16/1

Receivers

80	Alexander, Stephen (TE)	6-4/246	11-7-75	R	Oklahoma	D2/98	—
84	Asher, Jamie (TE)	6-3/245	10-31-72	4	Louisville	D5a/95	16/13
83	Connell, Albert	6-0/179	5-13-74	2	Texas A&M	D4/97	5/1
85	Frisch, David (TE)	6-7/260	6-22-70	6	Colorado State	FA/97	2/0
88	Jenkins, James (TE)	6-2/249	8-17-67	8	Rutgers	FA/91	16/4
32	Lusk, Henry (TE)	6-2/250	5-8-72	3	Utah	FA/98	0/0*
14	Palmer, Pat	6-2/181	7-13-75	R	Northwestern State (La.)	D6/98	—
46	Sanders, Chris (TE)	6-3/241	4-22-73	1	Texas A&M	FA/98	1/0*
86	Shepherd, Leslie	5-11/186	11-3-69	5	Temple	FA/94	11/9
89	Thomas, Chris	6-2/190	7-16-71	3	Cal Poly-SLO	FA/95	13/0
87	Thrash, James	6-0/200	4-28-75	2	Missouri Southern	FA/97	4/0
82	Westbrook, Michael	6-3/220	7-7-72	4	Colorado	D1/95	13/9

Offensive Linemen

74	Badger, Brad (G)	6-4/298	1-11-75	2	Stanford	D5d/97	12/2
61	Batiste, Michael (G)	6-3/325	12-24-70	2	Tulane	FA/97	0/0
	Cocozzo, Joe (G)	6-4/300	8-7-70	5	Michigan	FA/98	16/12*
75	Drake, Troy (T)	6-6/305	5-15-72	4	Indiana	FA/98	9/2*
60	Fischer, Mark (C)	6-3/293	7-29-74	R	Purdue	D5/98	—
77	Johnson, Tre' (T)	6-2/326	8-30-71	5	Temple	D2/94	11/10
79	Miller, Jeff (T)	6-4/303	11-23-72	3	Mississippi	FA/98	0/0*
69	Milstead, Rod (G)	6-2/290	11-10-69	7	Delaware State	FA/98	4/0*
68	Patton, Joe (T)	6-5/306	1-5-72	4	Alabama A&M	D3b/94	16/16
67	Pourdanesh, Shar (T)	6-6/312	7-19-70	3	Nevada	FA/96	16/14
64	Powell, Ozell (T)	6-5/316	11-17-73	1	Alabama	FA/98	0/0*
52	Raymer, Cory (C)	6-2/289	3-3-73	4	Wisconsin	D2/95	6/3
66	Turk, Dan (C)	6-4/290	6-25-62	13	Wisconsin	FA/97	16/0
55	Uhlenhake, Jeff (C)	6-3/291	1-28-66	9	Ohio State	FA/96	14/13

Defensive Linemen

93	Boutte, Marc (T)	6-4/307	7-26-69	7	LSU	FA/94	16/13
78	Brown, Doug (T)	6-7/290	9-29-74	1	Simon Fraser (Can.)	FA/98	0/0*
92	Duff, Jamal (E)	6-7/285	3-11-72	4	San Diego State	FA/97	13/5
97	Kinney, Kelvin (E)	6-6/264	12-31-72	3	Virginia State	D6/96	4/1
90	Kuehl, Ryan (T)	6-4/289	1-18-72	2	Virginia	FA/97	12/5
90	Lang, Kenard (E)	6-4/277	1-31-75	2	Miami (Fla.)	D1/97	12/11
96	Owens, Rich (E)	6-6/281	5-22-72	4	Lehigh	D5b/95	16/15
94	Stubblefield, Dana (T)	6-2/315	11-14-70	6	Kansas	FA/98	16/16*
95	Wilkinson, Dan (T)	6-5/313	3-13-73	5	Ohio State	T-Cin/98	15/15

Linebackers

58	Alexander, Patrise	6-1/244	10-23-72	3	SW Louisiana	FA/96	16/0
59	Barber, Shawn	6-2/224	1-14-75	R	Richmond	D4/98	—
57	Harvey, Ken	6-2/237	5-6-65	11	California	FA/94	15/14
54	Jones, Greg	6-4/238	5-22-74	2	Colorado	D2/97	16/3
53	Patton, Marvius	6-2/236	5-1-67	9	UCLA	FA/95	16/16
51	Ponds, Antwuan	6-2/252	6-29-75	R	Syracuse	D7b/98	—
98	Russell, Twan	6-1/219	4-25-74	2	Miami (Fla.)	D5c/97	14/0
50	Smith, Derek	6-2/239	1-18-75	2	Arizona State	D3/97	16/16

Defensive Backs

37	Campbell, Jesse (S)	6-1/211	4-11-69	8	North Carolina State	FA/97	16/16
26	Dishman, Kris (CB)	6-0/195	8-13-65	11	Purdue	FA/97	16/15
35	Evans, Leomont (S)	6-1/202	7-12-74	3	Clemson	D5/96	16/0
28	Green, Darrell (CB)	5-8/184	2-15-60	16	Texas A&I	D1/83	16/16
31	Pounds, Darryl (CB)	5-10/189	7-21-72	4	Nicholls State	D3/95	16/0
24	Richard, Stanley (S)	6-2/198	10-21-67	8	Texas	FA/95	16/16
23	Terrell, David (CB)	6-2/172	7-8-75	R	Texas-El Paso	D7a/98	—
32	Thibodeaux, Keith (CB)	5-11/189	5-16-74	2	Northwestern State (La.)	D5b/97	15/0
29	Turner, Scott (CB)	5-10/180	2-26-72	4	Illinois	D7/95	9/0
22	Williams, Jamel (S)	5-11/205	12-22-73	2	Nebraska	D5a/97	16/0

Specialists

16	Blanton, Scott (K)	6-2/221	7-1-73	4	Oklahoma	FA/95	15/0
1	Turk, Matt (P)	6-5/237	6-16-68	4	Wisconsin-Whitewater	FA/95	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Patrick Augafa, C; Denault Brown, DT; Buddy Crutchfield, CB; Tim Denton, CB; Terry Grooms, DE; Malcolm Hamilton, LB; Eddie Howard, P; Danny Kight, K/P; Junior Lord, WR; Felman Malveaux, WR; Eric Matthews, WR; Norman Miller, RB; Brad Otton, QB; Kevin Pesak, FB; Noel Prefontaine, P; Zerick Rollins, DE; Mike Sellers, TE; Chris Shelton, FB; Jared Sloan, P; Neal Smith, DE; Marcus Stanton, S; Rahmann Streater, DE; Ousmane Tounkara, WR.

*—Not with Redskins in 1997.

REDSKINS

Washington OFFENSE

WR Westbrook Thrash
RB Allen Davis
QB Frerotte Hostetler
C Raymer Uhlenhake
FB Bowie Mitchell
TE Asher Alexander
WR Shepherd Connell

Washington DEFENSE

CB Green Thibodeaux
RE Owens Kinney
RT Stubblefield Kuehl
LT Wilkinson Boutte
LE Lang Duff
CB Dishman Pounds
WR Green Thibodeaux
RB Allen Davis
QB Frerotte Hostetler
C Raymer Uhlenhake
FB Bowie Mitchell
TE Asher Alexander
WR Shepherd Connell

Probable starters listed on top

WR Green Thibodeaux
RB Allen Davis
QB Frerotte Hostetler
C Raymer Uhlenhake
FB Bowie Mitchell
TE Asher Alexander
WR Shepherd Connell
CB Green Thibodeaux
RE Owens Kinney
RT Stubblefield Kuehl
LT Wilkinson Boutte
LE Lang Duff
CB Dishman Pounds
WR Green Thibodeaux
RB Allen Davis
QB Frerotte Hostetler
C Raymer Uhlenhake
FB Bowie Mitchell
TE Asher Alexander
WR Shepherd Connell

K: Blanton
P: Turk
KR: Mitchell, Thrash
PR: Mitchell, Thrash

Washington DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE IWERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Joe Cocozzo, G (FA/Chargers); Troy Drake, OT (FA/Eagles); Rod Milstead, G (FA/49ers); Dana Stubblefield, DT (FA/49ers); Dan Wilkinson, DT (trade/Bengals).

Key losses: Bob Dahl, G (FA); Henry Ellard, WR (retired); William Gaines, DT (released); Sean Gilbert, DT (FA/Panthers); Marc Logan, FB (FA); Chris Mims, DT (released); Ed Simmons, OT (released/Rams).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
2nd	Stephen Alexander	TE	Oklahoma
3rd	Skip Hicks	RB	UCLA
4th	Shawn Barber	LB	Richmond
5th	Mark Fischer	C	Purdue
6th	Pat Palmer	WR	Northwestern St. (La.)
7th	David Terrell	CB	Texas-El Paso
7th	Antwaune Ponds	LB	Syracuse

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	CB Tom Carter	Starter with Bears
1994	QB Heath Shuler	Reserve with Saints
1995	WR Michael Westbrook	Starter with Redskins
1996	OT Andre Johnson	Reserve with Lions
1997	DE Kenard Lang	Starter with Redskins

Coaching Staff

Coach: Norv Turner. **Offensive staff:** Russ Grimm (offensive line) • Bobby Jackson (running backs) • Mike Martz (quarterbacks) • Michael Pope (tight ends) • Terry Robiskie (wide receivers) • Ed Sidwell (offensive assistant). **Defensive staff:** Jeff Fitzgerald (defensive assistant) • Tom Hayes (defensive

backs) • Earl Leggett (defensive line) • Dale Lindsey (linebackers) • Mike Nolan (defensive coordinator). **Others:** Jason Arapoff (conditioning director) • LeCharles McDaniel (special teams) • Dan Riley (strength).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 8-7-1 (2nd in NFC East); 4-3-1 in division; 7-4-1 in conference; 5-2-1 at home; 3-5 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Turner's regular-season record: 26-37 in four seasons with Redskins.

Turner's postseason record: None.

Team record past five years: 30-49-1 (.381, ranks 23rd in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1992.

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*312.4	6	16
Rushing offense	*100.9	12	21
Passing offense	*211.4	4	11
Scoring offense	327	5	15
Total defense	*314.4	10	16
Rushing defense	*138.3	15	28
Passing defense	*176.1	3	3
Scoring defense	289	5	T8
Takeaways	30	T6	T11
Giveaways	29	8	18
Turnover differential	1	7	T14
Sacks	37	13	T21
Sacks allowed	33	T4	T9

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

When it comes to combined net yards—yards gained rushing, receiving and on returns—Brian Mitchell is the Redskins' best ever:

Player	Seasons	Rush.	Rec.	Ret.	Total
Brian Mitchell	'90-97	1,323	1,476	9,994	12,793
Art Monk	'80-93	332	12,026	0	12,358
Charley Taylor	'64-77	1,488	9,140	205	10,833
Gary Clark	'85-92	41	8,742	62	8,845
John Riggins	'76-79, '81-85	7,472	928	0	8,400
Larry Brown	'69-76	5,875	2,485	0	8,360
Bobby Mitchell	'62-68	438	6,492	1,232	8,162

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at N.Y. Giants	1:01
Sept. 14	SAN FRANCISCO (Mon.)	8:20
Sept. 20	at Seattle	1:05
Sept. 27	DENVER	1:01
Oct. 4	DALLAS	1:01
Oct. 11	at Philadelphia	1:01
Oct. 18	at Minnesota	12:01
Oct. 25	Open date	
Nov. 1	N.Y. GIANTS	1:01
Nov. 8	at Arizona	2:05
Nov. 15	PHILADELPHIA	1:01
Nov. 22	ARIZONA	1:01
Nov. 29	at Oakland	1:15
Dec. 6	SAN DIEGO	1:01
Dec. 13	at Carolina	1:01
Dec. 19	TAMPA BAY (Sat.)	4:05
Dec. 27	at Dallas	7:20

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T25TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Carolina	W	24-10
Sept. 7	at Pittsburgh	L	13-14
Sept. 14	ARIZONA (OT)	W	19-13
Sept. 21	Open date		
Sept. 28	JACKSONVILLE	W	24-12
Oct. 5	at Philadelphia	L	10-24
Oct. 13	DALLAS	W	21-16
Oct. 19	at Tennessee	L	14-28
Oct. 26	BALTIMORE	L	17-20
Nov. 2	at Chicago	W	31-8
Nov. 9	DETROIT	W	30-7
Nov. 16	at Dallas	L	14-17
Nov. 23	N.Y. GIANTS (OT)	T	7-7
Nov. 30	ST. LOUIS	L	20-23
Dec. 7	at Arizona	W	38-28
Dec. 13	at N.Y. Giants	L	10-30
Dec. 21	PHILADELPHIA	W	35-32

Miscellaneous

Chairman: John Kent Cooke Sr.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Jack Kent Cooke (80,116, grass).

Ticket information: 301-276-6050.

Flagship radio station: WJFK-FM, 106.7.

Training site: Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Md.; 301-687-7975.



Despite his advancing age, Green continues to get the job done at cornerback. He was selected for his seventh Pro Bowl last season.

games, made plays and pressured quarterbacks. Lang should be even better this season.

Right end Rich Owens has a lot to prove. After 11 sacks in 1996, he had just 3½ last season. He needs to prove '96 was the real Rich Owens, not '97. Pushing him is Kelvin Kinney, a third-year player who saw his first NFL action last season. Kinney is not the pass rusher Owens is, but he plays extremely hard and isn't afraid to stick his nose in front of oncoming linemen and backs.

Marc Boutte and Ryan Kuehl provide depth at the tackles, while Jamal Duff should be a backup behind Lang.

LINEBACKERS—The line *should* be a strength, but the Redskins know their linebacking corps will be OK.

Marcus Patton is indomitable in the middle. He plays every down, stops the run, defends the pass and provides physical and verbal leadership. Ken Harvey is still one of the best pass-rushing linebackers in the league. And Derek Smith had a solid rookie year at the other outside spot and should be even better this season.

Greg Jones played well when he was given the opportunity to fill in for Harvey last season and is challenging the coaches to find ways to use him more. Twan Russell backs up Smith and is a mainstay on special teams. Rookie Shawn Barber showed signs of being the coverage linebacker the Redskins felt they were missing in nickel situations last season.

SECONDARY—Sooner or later, cornerback Darrell Green will slow down, but it appears it's going to be later rather than sooner. Last year, at 37, he had one of his better seasons, earning his seventh Pro Bowl trip.

All fellow cornerback Cris Dishman did last season was change the face of the Redskins' pass defense. He was almost impossible to throw against, which is one reason the pass defense excelled and teams opted to run so often.

Darryl Pounds, who backs up Dishman and Green, is good enough to start for a number of NFL teams. The Redskins are looking for a fourth cornerback and hope second-year man Keith Thibodeaux or rookie David Terrell can fill the spot.

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B-	Defensive line:	B
Offensive backfield:	C+	Linebackers:	B
Offensive line:	C	Secondary:	B+
Receivers:	C	Special teams:	C+

Free safety Stanley Richard played well for three-fourths of the season, and the Redskins would like to get a complete year out of him in '98. Jesse Campbell is solid at strong safety. Leomont Evans needs to show more consistency as a backup, as does Jamel Williams. Williams—who was a big-play linebacker at Nebraska—has the potential to be a playmaker and might be more prone to show that this season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Mitchell is one of the best return men in NFL history, a threat to return any kickoff or punt for a touchdown. He's built along the lines of a fullback with running back speed, so he's tough, durable and never shies from contact. At times during the past two seasons, he was frustrated by a lack of blocking. When Mitchell has complained publicly, his teammates have improved their performances.

Kicker Scott Blanton is extremely accurate from 40 yards and in and has never missed an extra point in his two pro seasons. His short kickoffs are a concern, though.

Few punters in the NFL are superior to Matt Turk, whose performances in some games have been so decisive in the field-position battle that he could have been the Redskins' MVP for that week.

The shortcomings of the special teams have been finding young players who appreciate the importance of these units and will fill their roles with enthusiasm and consistency. One of McDaniel's primary objectives is to correct that thinking.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The first half of the schedule has the potential to be a back-breaker. The Redskins open against the Giants on the road and are at home for a Monday night game in Week 2 against San Francisco, a team they play with some frequency but haven't beaten since 1986. A trip to Seattle follows. Then come home games against Denver and Dallas, followed by road games against Philadelphia (a tough place for the Redskins in recent years) and Minnesota.

The past two seasons, the Redskins have played their best games early in the season against strong opponents; thus, it wouldn't be surprising to see them 5-3 or 4-4 at the halfway point.

Then, as recent history has shown, things get difficult. Whether it has been the inconsistency of youth, injuries, fate or even bad karma, the Redskins have had difficulty maintaining their early-season form as the season wears on. This year will be particularly interesting. In their final nine games, the Redskins face just two teams that were in the playoffs last year, the Giants and Tampa Bay. They have a game at Oakland and a home game with San Diego, two teams that could be out of the playoff picture by the time they face Washington. The Redskins face Arizona twice in three weeks in mid-November, and the Cardinals could be the division's, if not the league's, most improved team.

The unknown factor could be the Cowboys. If they return to form, their game with the Redskins on December 27 could be for the division title or a playoff spot.

BOTTOM LINE

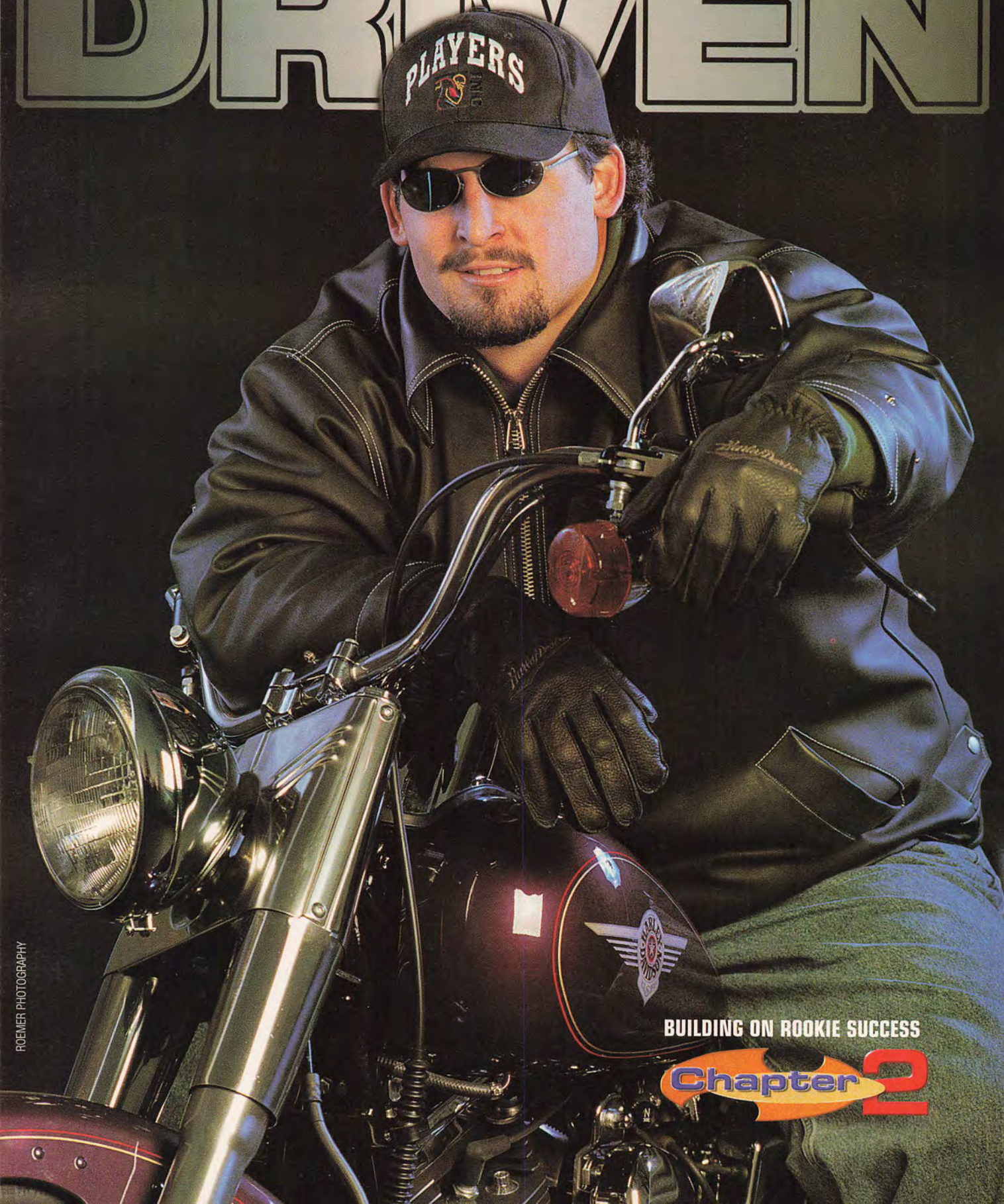
Frerotte has to play at a higher level and never head-butt a stadium wall again. But he needs help from the line and the running game. In addition, the rebuilt defensive line has to stop opposing running attacks and pressure quarterbacks.

If Frerotte and both lines play well, the Redskins will be in the hunt for the NFC East championship. If they don't, the team will struggle to reach .500.

TSN

Paul Woody covers the Redskins for the Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch.

DRIVEN



ROEMER PHOTOGRAPHY

BUILDING ON ROOKIE SUCCESS

Chapter 2

TO SUCCEED

BY TOM SILVERSTEIN

Try to tell Packers tackle Ross Verba how much more he has to learn about the game of football and you're liable to get one of those stone-faced glares that informs you that you don't know what you're talking about.

The guy has a point. In his first season in the NFL, Verba—a first-round pick from Iowa—held out in a contract dispute for 22 days, beat out a former first-round pick for the left tackle job, gave up just 2½ sacks in 13 games as a starter and was the first rookie left tackle to start in the Super Bowl.

"There is no situation that the NFL could throw at me that I couldn't handle," Verba says. "I've played against the biggest defensive ends in the world and I've been to the biggest game in the world. Now it's just a matter of fine-tuning it."

Though he wasn't a candidate for rookie of the year, Verba turned out to be as valuable as any player on the team. Three-time MVP Brett Favre was a sitting duck until Verba replaced '96 first-rounder John Michels six weeks into the season and solidified the most important position on the line.

By no means was Verba great. Consider Bruce Smith's assessment of Verba after two quarters of head-to-head action: "He's all right. He's in the NFL, so naturally he has the capabilities of being a good player."

Actually, he was a godsend for the Packers, adding consistency and reliability to the position. With the exception of a two-minute span in Super Bowl XXXII when he committed two critical penalties, he was unflappable, playing with a nastiness and intensity that rubbed off on linemates. Not only did the line allow just 26 sacks, the lowest total in team history since the advent of the 16-game schedule, it paved the way for Dorsey Levens to rush for 1,435 yards.

"Let's say this: Had he not had the aggressiveness and attitude, he couldn't have done what he did," offensive line coach Tom Lovat says. "He was not in sync yet (when he became a starter). As he played, more and more the technique part caught up. But he still has a ways to go."

At 6-3 and 298 pounds, Verba doesn't have the dimensions to be a great left tackle. He lacks the height and wing span that allow the great ones to gain leverage on opponents. Thus, if he is going to survive—and thrive—he's going to have to be a great technician.

Verba says he played with proper technique 70 to 80 percent of the time, giving in to raw instinct on the other occasions. To reach the level of veterans such as right tackle Earl Dotson and center Frank Winters, he estimates he'll have to reach the 90th percentile.

"I want to get my hands inside more on a consistent level," Verba says. "You're not really taught that on the college level. But here it is drilled into your head, and by the end of the season I was getting my hands inside. If you can get your hands inside, you win."

Interestingly, Verba's best quality might keep him from being the Packers' left tackle of the future. Because he is athletic enough to get out in the open field, he can play

either guard position, making him the most versatile lineman on the team. Were Michels—or any other prospect—able to force himself into the lineup, Verba would probably be moved to guard so the team could

get the five best linemen on the field. Verba isn't thrilled with that prospect.

"I'd be pissed," he says. "I'd do it, but I definitely would have a sit-down meeting with the whole front office and tell them how I feel."

As he heads into his second season, there is no reason to believe Verba will be anywhere but at left tackle for the Packers. He'll have an entire offseason and training camp instead of just four weeks to sharpen his skills.

Verba lacks the explosiveness in his hips and legs to be a dominant run blocker, but that isn't of great concern to the Packers. They want him to protect Favre, and if he does nothing else, they will be thrilled. But Verba expects a lot more of himself. Every time he steps onto Lambeau Field he is reminded of what it would mean to be considered one of the greatest of all time.

"My ultimate goal is to be the best player to ever play the game, regardless of whether I get there or not," Verba says. "I don't think there's anything wrong with saying it."

"I'm just going to go out on the field and play hard each game. Someday, I want to have my name up there on the Packer wall (of fame) next to (former line great) Forrest Gregg. Why not?"

TSN

Tom Silverstein covers the Packers for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

The versatile—and verbose— Ross Verba was an instant success for the Packers



If the Bears keep piling up the losses, there could be some jobs lost, too

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 5th

BY JOHN MULLIN

The Bears began to do the once-unthinkable in 1997: lose the city of Chicago, which never has wavered from being a Bears town even through the leanest of years. Fans questioned the commitment and competence of the organization off the field, and the talent and coaching on it. They're still not sure, and the Bears will need some breaks to turn opinions—and their fortunes—around this season.

Over the past five years, the rest of a good NFC Central has left Chicago behind. The Bears haven't finished .500 or better in their division under coach Dave Wannstedt, and they have only a slim chance of doing that this year. Two winning seasons and one playoff trip in six years have left the team with no momentum or winning spirit. If the Bears flop early this season, Wannstedt's tenure may be up sooner rather than later, regardless of the two years and \$2.5 million remaining on his contract.

COACHING

Wannstedt is coaching for his job. Last year, with injuries, a monster early schedule and three years left on his contract, he figured to survive with a 4-12 record, which he did. This year, the best guess is that he needs 7-9 or 6-10 with an upset or two.

It won't be easy. The team kept playing for Wannstedt despite last year's 0-7 start, but the team's extended lack of success hasn't helped Wannstedt's credibility in the locker room. Some early wins in '98 would go a long way toward bringing a shaky team together behind him. Some early losses and

Wannstedt has made no substantive staff changes since he arrived in Chicago five years ago. Turnover has shuffled the group somewhat. But nearly all the assistants' contracts are up after this year, and a major shakeup is likely without real progress. The personnel area has been beefed up after years of inexcusable understaffing, and president Michael McCaskey will hold the coaches accountable next if nothing improves. The shifting of personnel duties away from Wannstedt should help him focus on what he does well, which is coach.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Re-signing Erik Kramer was an offseason priority, and the entire team will benefit from him being the undisputed No. 1 quarterback. Kramer was the players' choice, and he pressured management into committing to improvements before he would sign his three-year, \$9 million contract.

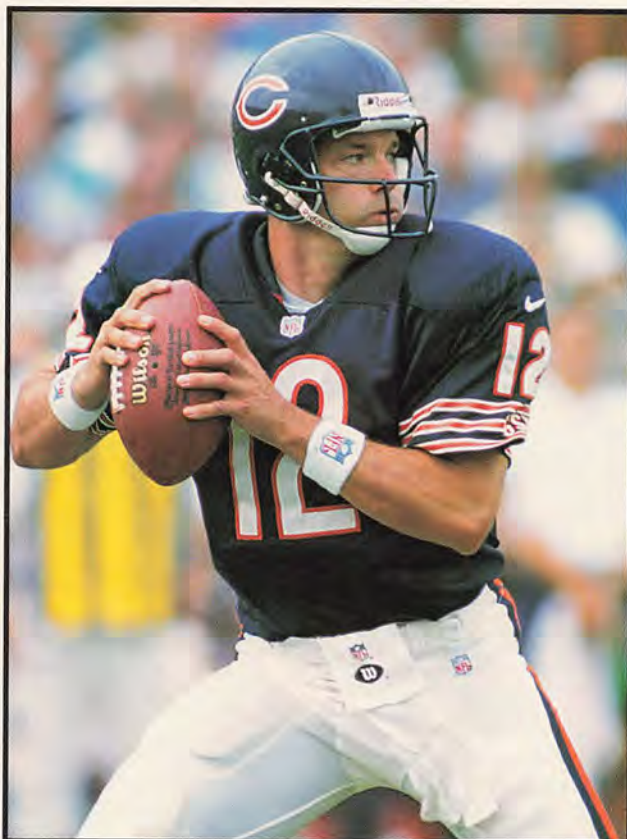
The Bears flirted with various possible backups, but the price and potential of Rick Mirer got him another year at a reduced salary. Mirer wasn't ready to take over last year, and the whole team paid a steep price for a badly handled shuffle under center. Kramer and Mirer should benefit from an absence of pressure from each other this year.

Rookie Moses Moreno rates an early edge, based on upside, to unseat three-year pro Steve Stenstrom for the No. 3 job.

RUNNING BACKS—Because they view Curtis Enis as a franchise back, the Bears weren't willing to take less than a great deal to give up the No. 5 pick in the draft. It is hoped Enis will spark a running game that has not averaged 4.0 yards per rush since 1992.

At 6-1, 242, Enis is big enough to hammer between the tackles, and his receiving ability should get him about 25 touches per game. The Bears hope Enis' strained hamstring in minicamp wasn't an omen, as injuries to Raymont Harris and Rashaan Salaam the past two years were the undoing of the offense.

Signing Edgar Bennett from the Packers was a mild surprise because of Bennett's 1997 torn Achilles' and his age (29). But Bennett is a



Kramer signed a three-year deal to remain in Chicago and heads into the season as the Bears' undisputed starting quarterback.

proven all-around back who projects to take over third-down responsibilities for the departed Harris. He also could start a few games until Enis masters routes and pass protections.

Bulky fullback Ty Hallock was signed to be the lead blocker, a sure sign the Bears intend to run the power-I as much as ever. Hallock is about 25 pounds heavier than the player he replaces, the departed Tony Carter.

RECEIVERS—Even with the arrival of Enis, Curtis Conway may hold the key to whatever offensive success the Bears have. They were 3-4 with him in the lineup last year but 1-8 when he was injured. Conway's speed makes him a threat to catch any ball, and he has a fifth gear for deep throws. He will work the middle, where he and Kramer like to use slants.

But Conway has led the Bears in receiving only once in his five years with the team, and the club needs bigger years out of Bobby Engram and Chris Penn to take some of the double teams away from Conway. Engram and Penn are solid possession receivers, but neither has shown consistent deep speed. And both had too many drops last year to suit the coaches.

Drafting John Allred and Alonzo Mayes the past two years, plus the re-signing of Ryan Wetnight, speaks volumes about the team's determination to make tight end a bigger force in the offense. Allred had some injury problems as a rookie and did not show much as a receiver. He could be squeezed out by Mayes, a first-round talent who slipped into the fourth round after a positive test for marijuana. Kramer's description of Mayes when he saw the 6-5, 256-pound

rookie in the first minicamp seems apt: "An oak tree who can run." Tremayne Allen may be in the picture as a dual tight end/fullback.

LINE—The line has been a consistent pass-blocking unit but needs to step up in run blocking. With better skill-position talent, it should improve. Left guard Todd Perry, right guard Chris Villarrial (who spent last season at center) and right tackle James Williams are physical blockers. Left tackle Andy Heck is underrated as a pass protector. Heck and Perry are entering their fifth year next to each other and work well together.

Center is the biggest question: Will it be injury-plagued Casey Wiegmann or No. 3 pick Olin Kreutz? Neither has experience, but each would benefit from playing between Perry, the team's best all-around lineman, and Villarrial, who has the disposition and skills to be a star. The Bears' zone-blocking scheme relies heavily on combination blocks inside, so the team must have a decisive center able to read defenses on the fly.

Injuries hurt the line in '97 as Perry (hamstring) and Villarrial (broken leg) each missed five games. In addition, Perry and Williams—who had his shoulder 'scoped in the offseason—were nowhere close to healthy the entire season. Free-agent addition Mike Zandofsky, No. 3 tackle Jimmy Herndon and either Kreutz or Wiegmann provide depth that has been sorely lacking the past couple of seasons.

DEFENSE

LINE—If the Bears don't improve here, particularly the pass rush, there is little chance they can avoid giving up more than 300 points for a fifth consecutive season. No lineman had more than six sacks (Jim Flanigan) last season, and the lack of dominance from the base front four forced coaches to blitz too often and tinker with five-man fronts.

With Alonzo Spellman's situation uncertain, the Bears are shuffling. Carl Simpson projects as the first-down right end and rush-down tackle, both assignments formerly belonging to Spellman. Flanigan is the Bears' best all-around lineman, but he can be overpowered at the point. Mike Wells was signed away from the Lions to put mass at right tackle and hopefully relieve some of the double teams on Flanigan. Mark Thomas is a solid rusher from left end; Thomas is quick enough but sometimes ran himself into trouble against the run. He needs to prove he can hold the point, particularly playing next to Flanigan.

John Thierry's torn ACL makes him a question mark. He has good speed but lacks the size to be a short-yardage stalwart.

LINEBACKERS—Barry Minter's ability to play all three positions on any down made re-signing him a priority. His best spot is on the weakside, but he anchors the middle in nickel packages. He could play there on every down if Wells can stuff the run up front. The coaches' faith in Minter was the main reason Bryan Cox was deemed expendable.

Third-year player Michael Lowery has the speed to earn a shot on the weakside, but he must show he's more than a special teams player. Ron Cox is a consistent player whose strength is against the run, but he is not getting any better or faster at age 30. Sean Harris is in his fourth year but has never taken the strongside job, which has been all but handed to him in the past.

Coaches are hoping Daryl Carter will surprise. Carter was a practice-squadder last year, but the Bears are optimistic he can provide depth as well as

Chicago Bears

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
12	Kramer, Erik	6-1/204	11-6-64	9	North Carolina State	FA/94	15/13
13	Mirer, Rick	6-2/215	3-19-70	6	Notre Dame	T-Sea/97	7/3
	Moreno, Moses	6-1/195	9-5-75	R	Colorado State	D7b/98	—
18	Stenstrom, Steve	6-2/202	12-23-71	4	Stanford	W-KC/95	3/0

Running Backs

20	Allen, James	5-10/215	3-28-75	1	Oklahoma	FA/97	0/0
21	Autry, Darnell	5-10/210	6-19-76	2	Northwestern	D4a/97	13/3
32	Bennett, Edgar	6-0/218	2-15-69	7	Florida State	FA/98	0/0*
	Enis, Curtis	6-1/242	6-15-76	R	Penn State	D1/98	—
49	Hallock, Ty (FB)	6-2/256	4-30-71	6	Michigan State	FA/98	15/8*
33	Harmon, Ronnie	5-11/195	5-7-64	13	Iowa	FA/96	12/0*
31	Salaam, Rashaan	6-1/224	10-8-74	4	Colorado	D1/95	3/3
22	Tindale, Tim (FB)	5-10/220	4-15-71	4	Western Ontario (Can.)	FA/98	7/0 *

Receivers

85	Allen, Tremayne (TE)	6-2/244	8-9-74	2	Florida	UFA/97	2/0
84	Allred, John (TE)	6-4/249	9-9-74	2	USC	D2/97	15/4
82	Bowmes, Fabien	5-11/190	2-29-72	2	Western Illinois	FA/95	16/0
80	Conway, Curtis	6-0/194	3-13-71	6	USC	D1/93	7/7
81	Engram, Bobby	5-10/192	1-7-73	3	Penn State	D2/96	11/11
87	Lewis, Thomas	6-1/195	1-10-72	5	Indiana	FA/98	4/2*
88	Mayes, Alonzo (TE)	6-4/259	6-4-75	R	Oklahoma State	D4/98	—
15	Miller, Chris	5-10/192	7-10-73	1	USC	D7/97	0/0
86	Penn, Chris	6-0/200	4-20-71	5	Tulsa	T-KC/97	14/4
83	Robinson, Marcus	6-3/215	2-27-75	1	South Carolina	D4b/97	0/0
14	Smith, Eric	5-11/183	1-5-71	2	LSU	FA/97	7/0
89	Wetnight, Ryan (TE)	6-2/236	11-5-70	6	Stanford	FA/93	16/3

Offensive Linemen

64	Heck, Andy (T)	6-6/298	1-1-67	10	Notre Dame	FA/94	16/16
74	Herndon, Jimmy (T)	6-8/318	8-30-73	3	Houston	D5/96	7/0
67	Huntington, Greg (C/G)	6-3/308	9-22-70	5	Penn State	FA/96	1/0
57	Kreutz, Olin (C)	6-2/300	6-9-77	R	Washington	D3/98	—
65	Mannely, Patrick (T)	6-5/285	4-18-75	R	Duke	D6b/98	—
69	Overhauser, Chad (G)	6-4/296	6-17-75	R	UCLA	D7a/98	—
75	Perry, Todd (G)	6-5/308	11-28-70	6	Kentucky	D4a/93	11/11
58	Villarrial, Chris (C)	6-4/310	6-9-73	3	Indiana (Pa.)	D5/96	11/11
60	Wiegmann, Casey (C)	6-3/295	7-20-73	3	Iowa	W-Ind/96	4/0
71	Williams, James (T)	6-7/340	3-29-68	8	Cheyney (Pa.)	FA/91	16/16
72	Zandofsky, Mike (G)	6-2/308	11-30-65	10	Washington	FA/98	5/2*
73	Zitelli, Emmett (C)	6-3/295	3-13-74	1	Purdue	UFA/97	0/0

Defensive Linemen

99	Flanigan, Jim (T)	6-2/286	8-27-71	5	Notre Dame	D3/94	16/16
93	Grasmanis, Paul (T)	6-2/298	8-2-74	3	Notre Dame	D4/96	16/0
76	Lee, Mark (E)	6-4/270	6-4-72	1	Western State (Colo.)	W-Wash/97	0/0
68	Reeves, Carl (E)	6-4/270	12-17-71	3	North Carolina State	D6b/95	15/15
98	Simpson, Carl (T)	6-2/292	4-18-70	6	Florida State	D2/93	16/16
90	Spellman, Alonzo (E)	6-4/292	9-27-71	7	Ohio State	D1/92	7/5
91	Thierry, John (E)	6-4/265	9-4-71	5	Alcorn State	D1/94	9/9
95	Thomas, Mark (E)	6-5/272	5-6-69	7	North Carolina State	FA/97	16/7
97	Wells, Mike (T)	6-3/310	1-6-71	5	Iowa	FA/98	16/16*
96	Williams, Tyrone (T)	6-4/292	10-22-72	1	Wyoming	W-SIL/97	3/0

Linebackers

59	Carter, Daryl	6-2/232	2-24-75	1	Wisconsin	UFA/97	1/0
	Collins, Andre	6-1/231	5-4-68	9	Penn State	FA/98	16/0*
54	Cox, Ron	6-2/235	2-27-68	9	Fresno State	FA/96	15/13
63	Draft, Chris	5-11/222	2-26-76	R	Stanford	D6/98	—
55	Harris, Sean	6-3/248	2-25-72	4	Arizona	D3/95	11/1
94	Hogans, Richard	6-2/249	7-8-75	1	Memphis	D6b/97	0/0
53	Lowery, Michael	6-0/232	2-14-74	3	Mississippi	FA/96	16/0
56	McDonald, Ricardo	6-2/240	11-8-69	7	Pittsburgh	D4/92	13/12
92	Minter, Barry	6-2/242	1-28-70	6	Tulsa	T-Dal/93	16/16
62	Peoples, Shont'e	6-2/249	8-30-72	1	Michigan	FA/98	15/15*

Defensive Backs

30	Bell, Ricky (CB)	5-10/194	10-2-74	3	North Carolina State	W-Pit/96	5/0
23	Carter, Marty (S)	6-1/214	12-17-69	8	Middle Tennessee State	FA/95	15/15
25	Carter, Tom (CB)	6-0/189	9-5-72	6	Notre Dame	FA/97	16/16
24	Cousin, Terry (CB)	5-9/182	3-11-75	2	South Carolina	UFA/97	6/0
46	Forbes, Marlon (S)	6-1/215	12-25-71	3	Penn State	FA/95	16/1
27	Harris, Walt (CB)	5-11/195	8-10-74	3	Mississippi State	D1/96	16/16
48	Hiles, Van (S)	6-0/198	11-1-75	2	Kentucky	D5b/97	16/1
35	Johnson, Clyde (S)	5-10/190	5-22-70	1	Kansas State	FA/97	15/0
26	Mangum, John (S)	5-10/192	3-16-67	9	Alabama	D7/90	16/16
44	Mathis, Dedric (CB)	5-10/188	9-26-73	3	Houston	FA/98	13/4*
37	Parrish, Tony (S)	5-11/205	11-23-75	R	Washington	D2/98	—

Specialists

1	Jaeger, Jeff (K)	5-11/190	11-26-64	12	Washington	FA/96	16/0
16	Sauerbrun, Todd (P)	5-10/209	1-4-73	4	West Virginia	D2/95	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Ken Anderson, DT; Anthony Bookman, RB/KR; Mike Brown, TE; Quincy Coleman, CB; Brad Crowley, DE; KeJaun DuBose, DT; Jim Farrell, WR; Chester Ford, FB; Aaron Kanner, P; Carlos Knight, RB; Jay Korth, G/C; Saladin McCullough, RB/KR; Jim McElroy, WR; Wasswa Serwanga, S; Greg Williams, S.

*—Not with Bears in 1997.

BEARS!

Chicago OFFENSE

Enis Bennett (RB)

Hallock Tindale (FB)

K: Jaeger
P: Sauerbrun
KR: Lewis, Bownes
PR: Ingram, Bookman

Conway Lewis (WR)

Heck Herndon (LT)

Perry Zandofsky (LG)

(QB) Kramer Mirer
(C) Kreutz Wiegmann

Villarrial Manelly (RG)

Williams Overhauser (RT)

Mayes Wetnight (TE)

Penn Ingram (WR)

W. Harris Mathis (CB)

Simpson Thierry (RE)

Wells Grasmanis (RT)

Flanigan Simpson (LT)

Thomas Reeves (LE)

T. Carter Cousin (CB)

Probable starters listed on top

Lowery D. Carter (OLD)

Parrish Mangum (FS)

Minter Hogans (MLB)

M. Carter Forbes (SS)

S. Harris Peoples (OLD)

Chicago DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE NYERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Edgar Bennett, RB (FA/Packers); Andre Collins, LB (FA/Bengals); Ty Hallock, FB (FA/Jaguars); Thomas Lewis, WR (FA/Giants); Dedic Mathis, CB (FA/Colts); Tim Tindale, FB (FA/Bills); Mike Wells, DT (FA/Lions); Mike Zandofsky, G (FA/Eagles).

Key losses: Todd Burger, G (FA/Jets); Tony Carter, FB (FA/Patriots); Bryan Cox, LB (released); Mike Dulaney, FB (FA/Panthers); Chris Gray, G (FA/Seahawks); Raymont Harris, RB (FA); Tyrone Hughes, KR (released); Ricky Proehl, WR (FA/Rams); Rashaan Salaam, RB (released).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Curtis Enis	RB	Penn State
2nd	Tony Parrish	S	Washington
3rd	Olin Kreutz	C	Washington
4th	Alonzo Mayes	TE	Oklahoma State
6th	Chris Draft	LB	Stanford
6th	Patrick Mannelly	T/G	Duke
7th	Chad Overhauser	G/T	UCLA
7th	Moses Moreno	QB	Colorado State

Past Five No. 1 Picks

1993	WR Curtis Conway	Starter with Bears
1994	DE John Thierry	Reserve with Bears
1995	RB Rashaan Salaam	Unsigned free agent
1996	CB Walt Harris	Starter with Bears
1997	None	

Coaching Staff

Coach: Dave Wannstedt. **Offensive staff:** Joe Brodsky (running backs) • Matt Cavanaugh (offensive coordinator/quarterbacks) • Ivan Fears (wide receivers) • Tom Rossley (tight ends) • Tony Wise (assistant head coach/offensive line).

Defensive staff: Clarence Brooks (defensive line) • Carlos Mainord (linebackers) • Greg Schiano (defensive backs) •

Bob Slowik (defensive coordinator/linebackers). **Others:** Keith Armstrong (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 4-12 (5th in NFC Central); 1-7 in division; 2-10 in conference; 2-6 at home; 2-6 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Wannstedt's regular-season record: 36-44 in five seasons with Bears.

Wannstedt's postseason record: 1-1 in one appearance with Bears.

Team record past five years: 36-44 (.450, ranks 17th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1994

1997 team rankings	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*311.7	7	17
Rushing offense	*109.1	9	16
Passing offense	*202.6	7	T15
Scoring offense	263	14	28
Total defense	*305.5	6	12
Rushing defense	*116.1	8	19
Passing defense	*189.4	9	11
Scoring defense	421	15	29
Takeaways	30	T6	T11
Giveaways	41	13	27
Turnover differential	-11	12	26
Sacks	38	T10	T18
Sacks allowed	43	8	17

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Only five teams had more first downs than points last season, a sure sign of offensive inefficiency. At minus 42, the Bears were the worst culprit in the league. Not surprisingly, none of the bottom five teams advanced to the playoffs. But the top five all did.

BOTTOM 5 TEAMS

Team	First downs	Points	Diff.	Record
Chicago	305	263	-42	4-12
Carolina	284	265	-19	7-9
Buffalo	268	255	-13	6-10
Arizona	295	283	-12	4-12
Philadelphia	326	317	-9	6-9-1

TOP 5 TEAMS

Team	First downs	Points	Diff.	Record
Denver	340	472	+132	12-4
New England	267	369	+102	10-6
Green Bay	325	422	+97	13-3
Jacksonville	308	394	+86	11-5
San Francisco	294	375	+81	13-3

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	JACKSONVILLE	12:01
Sept. 13	at Pittsburgh	1:01
Sept. 20	at Tampa Bay	4:05
Sept. 27	MINNESOTA	3:15
Oct. 4	DETROIT	12:01
Oct. 11	at Arizona	1:05
Oct. 18	DALLAS	3:15
Oct. 25	at Tennessee	3:05
Nov. 1	Open date	
Nov. 8	ST. LOUIS	12:01
Nov. 15	at Detroit	8:20
Nov. 22	at Atlanta	1:01
Nov. 29	TAMPA BAY	12:01
Dec. 6	at Minnesota	7:20
Dec. 13	at Green Bay	12:01
Dec. 20	BALTIMORE	12:01
Dec. 27	GREEN BAY	12:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 2ND

1997 Results

Sept. 1	at Green Bay	L	24-38
Sept. 7	MINNESOTA	L	24-27
Sept. 14	DETROIT	L	7-32
Sept. 21	at New England	L	3-31
Sept. 28	at Dallas	L	3-27
Oct. 5	NEW ORLEANS	L	17-20
Oct. 12	GREEN BAY	L	23-24
Oct. 19	Open date		
Oct. 27	at Miami (OT)	W	36-33
Nov. 2	WASHINGTON	L	8-31
Nov. 9	at Minnesota	L	22-29
Nov. 16	N.Y. JETS	L	15-23
Nov. 23	TAMPA BAY	W	13-7
Nov. 27	at Detroit	L	20-55
Dec. 7	BUFFALO	W	20-3
Dec. 14	at St. Louis	W	13-10
Dec. 21	at Tampa Bay	L	15-31

Miscellaneous

Chairman: Edward W. McCaskey.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Soldier Field (66,944, grass).

Ticket information: 847-615-2327.

Flagship radio station: WMAQ-AM, 670.

Training site: University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, Wis.; 608-342-1201.

help on special teams. Shont'e Peoples will get a look as a nickel rusher after compiling 13 sacks in Canada last season.

SECONDARY—Cornerback is the one area on defense that is both settled and has proven quality. Tom Carter got steadily better after signing as a free agent last year and has emerged as one of the team's leaders. Walt Harris went through an extremely shaky stretch early last season, when he lost confidence and was beaten often. But he finished strong and still has a major upside.

Coaches need Carter and Harris to be able to play more press coverage in a division known for dangerous passing offenses. Dedric Mathis and Terry Cousin are the reserve corners, but neither is going to worry Herman Moore or Brett Favre.

The Bears invested a No. 2 pick in safety Tony Parrish, a hitter with 4.45 speed who should be the starter at free safety. John Mangum led the team in tackles from that position last year, but that was out of necessity rather than choice. Mangum will return to nickel back, where he and Marlon Forbes are adequate playmakers. Strong safety Marty Carter, who was hampered by injuries last season, needs to return to his '96 form.

SPECIAL TEAMS

If addition by subtraction means anything, the Bears already are better here than they were a year ago. Return man Tyrone Hughes was cut after a terrible year that included his receiving a \$1 million signing bonus (good for him) and being benched by season's end (good for the team). The Bears also traded linebacker Anthony Peterson back to the 49ers after he failed to make a difference last year.

But the Bears have no sure improvements on hand, either. Coaches were regularly upset at punter Todd Sauerbrun for outkicking his coverage last year, but poor tackling and pursuit created even bigger problems. Sauerbrun has the leg strength to be a force, but he'll be challenged in camp. Jeff Jaeger has been an exceptional kicker at Soldier Field.

The return spots are open, with good reason. The Bears haven't returned a kickoff for a touchdown since 1992 or a punt since '94. Fabien Bownes, Thomas Lewis and rookie Anthony Bookman will get

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	C	Defensive line:	D
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	D
Offensive line:	B+	Secondary:	B
Receivers:	C-	Special teams:	D-

looks on kickoffs. Ingram, whose receiving production fell off last year, can help himself by taking over on punt returns.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

Simply by being in the NFC Central, the Bears have a rough schedule. Their four division rivals reached the playoffs, the second time in four years the division sent a quartet to the postseason and the third time in five years at least two wild cards have come from the division.

The problems don't stop there. With Jacksonville, Pittsburgh and three division games, the Bears start the year with five playoff opponents. For a team with as many as four rookie starters, this will be some serious NFL hazing. And four of the Bears' last five games are against division rivals as well.

If those late games are going to matter, though, the Bears need to make a statement in the middle of the season. They have a stretch of six games sandwiched around their bye week that includes only two opponents who had .500-or-better records in '97.

BOTTOM LINE

The monster early schedule does not engender hope for a struggling team. If the Bears can steal two of the first five games, they have a chance for a 7-9 season. If not, they'll likely have a top-10 draft slot again.

TSN

John Mullin covers the Bears for the Chicago Tribune.

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S98310



Ross makes no bones about it: Mitchell is the key for the Lions

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 4th

BY PAULA PASCHE

In his first year on the job last season, coach Bobby Ross failed to destroy the Lions' consistency. For the fourth time in the past five years, Detroit made the playoffs—and was promptly eliminated in the first round.

In the 33-year stretch from 1958-90, though, the Lions missed the playoffs 30 times. They're moving in the right direction, but at this pace, they won't make the Super Bowl until around the 22nd century.

Ross, in the second year of a five-year contract, doesn't plan on waiting that long. He's giving quarterback Scott Mitchell a one-year ultimatum—advance in the playoffs or else. Ross says he hasn't lost faith in Mitchell, but he also traded up to take Eastern Michigan quarterback Charlie Batch in the second round of the draft.

Ross believes some of the team's problems last season were because he was getting to know his players. Barry Sanders gained only 53 rushing yards in the first two games while Ross was learning how to best utilize him. It took Ross a little longer to get a handle on Mitchell, but he believes he has.

"I've got to be very patient with him when he's struggling. Every one of them has bad days—every one of them. As good as they are—even as good as a Dan Marino is or as good as a John Elway ... they all have bad games," Ross said. "What you try to do is go to a collection of plays that you know he can do well. That's how you try to get yourself out. I know that with Scott now; I didn't know it in the past."

Mitchell has moved into the upper echelon of quarterbacks—if not in production, then in expectations. Regardless of what he accomplishes in the regular season, Mitchell will be judged on how far he takes the team in the playoffs.

COACHING

Ross prides himself on the belief he'll never get outworked by another coach. His work ethic is unquestioned, but that's not how he won the hearts of his players last year. Ross has the determination to stick with his philosophy and his blueprint, but also the flexibility to make midstream adjustments. He listens to his players, but they've rarely felt the need to vocalize their beliefs because Ross usually ends up on the same page.

When he's wrong, Ross isn't afraid to step up and accept blame. When Sanders started slowly last year, Ross took the heat because he said his running back wasn't being used properly. In the final 14 games, Sanders rushed for 2,000 yards.

After scoring four touchdowns in the first four games, receiver Herman Moore wasn't used as much in red zone situations and scored just one touchdown in the next eight games. Ross then made sure the offense went back to Moore, who scored three times in the last month. Ross vows to increase Moore's workload in the red zone this season.

Ross has four years left on his contract, but he didn't go to Detroit with a five-year plan. Most of Detroit's stars are well into their prime, and Ross knows the time to strike is now.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Mitchell has been in two playoff games in Detroit and has played miserably in both. The confusing part is that he has closed the regular season with a bang—seven consecutive wins in 1995 and victories in five of the final six regular-season games last season. When the playoffs arrive and many players rise to the occasion, Mitchell doesn't. It's incorrect, though, to say Mitchell can't win the big one. In both of those seasons, he pulled off big victories with clutch plays to keep the Lions' playoff hopes alive. Physically, there's nothing



As mind-boggling as Sanders' stats were last year, they would have been even better had he gained more than 53 yards in the first two games.

Mitchell (6-6, 230) is incapable of doing well.

Mitchell isn't a crowd favorite and Detroit fans are going to be whistling for the arrival of Batch, who the Lions believe can eventually become a starter. The harsh reality is that it's definitely not going to be this year.

Jim Miller likely will be the No. 2 guy this season. Miller, signed as a free agent, lost his starting job in Pittsburgh to Kordell Stewart two years ago. Miller was with Jacksonville and Atlanta last season but didn't see any action. If he can get his confidence back, he could become one of the Lions' key free-agent signings.

RUNNING BACKS—The one knock on Sanders, and the one he'll probably never shake, is that he gets caught for too many negative-yardage plays. He was caught behind the line 47 times last season—which is about average for him—but those critics are missing the point.

Sanders isn't a singles hitter; he's the home run king. Sanders doesn't carry the ball on the goal line because Ross doesn't believe you send a thoroughbred to do the work of a plow horse. For that reason, Sanders had only 11 rushing touchdowns last season. But his average touchdown run was 37 yards.

Just as important, Sanders is getting better and stronger with age. He gained 2,053 yards in his ninth season, and there is nothing to indicate he will be any less effective this season.

In the backup role, Ron Rivers doesn't get many opportunities but has made the most of his few chances. Fullbacks Tommy Vardell and Cory Schlesinger added a new dimension to the offense. Both supposedly were one-dimensional, but proved otherwise. Vardell, known for his receiving ability, picked up his blocking. The word on Schlesinger was that he couldn't catch a cold, but it was a bad rap.

RECEIVERS—Moore and Johnnie Morton are one of the league's best receiving tandems and they're about to become more explosive. One of the biggest changes in Detroit's offense this season will be an emphasis on passes in the 17- to 22-yard area. Ross said the Lions threw only five of those passes last year—everything was either short or a fade.

Moore should have his fourth consecutive 100-catch season and is virtually unstoppable one-on-one because of his 6-3 frame and tremendous leaping ability. Morton is coming off his best year—80 catches and 1,057 yards. Morton has decent speed and does a good job of hitting the seams, especially down the middle when the free safety cheats to Moore's side.

Detroit didn't get enough production from the third receiver in the spread offense—just 10 catches—so the Lions drafted Virginia's Germane Crowell in the second round (50th overall). The rookie—second in career receiving yardage at Virginia behind Moore—has quick feet for a receiver his size (6-3).

Tight end David Sloan, a strong guy who can run, still is recovering from reconstructive knee surgery in 1996 and has yet to return to full strength. He should be 100 percent this season, but there's still a question of whether he'll regain his speed. He'll be backed up by Walter Rasby, Pete Chryplewicz and Eric Stocz. The Lions, who use a lot of two-tight end formations, are expected to keep four tight ends.

LINE—The Lions were able to re-sign left tackle Ray Roberts, who entertained several free-agent offers, but many questions remain, especially at center and right tackle.

Pro Bowl center Kevin Glover signed with Seattle and leaves a big void after 13 years in Detroit. The Lions are going to miss him more than they realize because he was a steadying influence on and off the field. Free agent Jim Pyne, who played left guard with Tampa Bay last season, was signed to replace Glover.

With right tackle covering Mitchell's blindside, the Lions are counting on second-year player Juan Roque, who played inconsistently in brief appearances last season. He missed the last part of the season after reconstructive knee surgery. Although he's expected to return, there always are questions when a 6-7, 330-pounder comes back from a knee injury. As insurance, the Lions retained Larry Tharpe, who started at that position last season and did an adequate job.

The guard positions are set with Jeff Hartings on the right and Mike Compton on the left, but there could be problems if the line is hit with injuries. Backup center Hessley Hempstead was lost for the year after a serious offseason knee injury. If Pyne goes down, there will be a lot of shuffling, with Compton moving to center. Tony Semple is a decent backup, but Ross may opt to move Roque inside and start Tharpe at tackle.

DEFENSE

LINE—Not only did Ross fail in his attempt to add beef to this position in the offseason, he actually lost

Detroit Lions

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
10	Batch, Charlie	6-2/216	12-5-74	R	Eastern Michigan	D2b/98	—
16	Miller, Jim	6-2/210	2-9-71	5	Michigan State	FA/98	0/0*
19	Mitchell, Scott	6-6/230	1-2-68	9	Utah	FA/94	16/16

Running Backs

21	Battle, Terry	5-11/197	2-7-76	2	Arizona State	D7a/97	0/0
34	Rivers, Ron	5-8/205	11-13-71	4	Fresno State	FA/94	16/0
20	Sanders, Barry	5-8/200	7-16-68	10	Oklahoma State	D1/89	16/16
30	Schlesinger, Cory (FB)	6-0/230	6-23-72	4	Nebraska	D6b/95	16/2
44	Vardell, Tommy (FB)	6-2/230	2-20-69	7	Stanford	FA/97	16/10
21	Williams, Allen	5-10/205	9-17-72	2	Georgia	FA/95	0/0

Receivers

80	Boyd, Tommie	6-0/195	12-21-71	2	Toledo	FA/96	16/1
81	Chryplewicz, Pete (TE)	6-5/253	4-27-74	2	Notre Dame	D5a/97	10/0
17	Crowell, Germane	6-3/213	9-13-76	R	Virginia	D2a/98	—
9	Maddox, Deon	5-10/175	2-18-74	1	Syracuse	FA/97	0/0
83	McCorvey, Kez	6-0/190	1-23-72	4	Florida State	D5b/95	7/0
84	Moore, Herman	6-4/210	10-20-69	8	Virginia	D1/91	16/16
87	Morton, Johnnie	6-0/190	10-7-71	5	USC	D1/94	16/16
89	Rasby, Walter (TE)	6-3/247	9-7-72	5	Wake Forest	FA/98	14/2*
86	Sloan, David (TE)	6-6/254	6-8-72	4	New Mexico	D3/95	14/12
82	Stocz, Eric (TE)	6-4/265	5-25-74	3	Westminster (Pa.)	FA/97	6/0

Offensive Linemen

79	Beverly, Eric (G)	6-3/279	3-28-74	1	Miami (Ohio)	FA/97	0/0
77	Compton, Mike (G)	6-6/297	9-18-70	6	West Virginia	D3b/93	16/16
74	Harrison, Chris (G)	6-3/290	2-25-72	3	Virginia	FA/96	0/0
64	Hartings, Jeff (G)	6-3/283	9-7-72	3	Penn State	D1b/96	16/16
66	Hempstead, Hessley (C/G)	6-1/295	1-29-72	4	Kansas	D7/95	16/1
70	Johnson, Andre (T)	6-5/314	8-25-73	3	Penn State	FA/97	0/0
76	Lwiwinski, Chris (G)	6-5/304	8-2-75	R	Indiana	D7/98	—
61	Pyne, Jim (C)	6-2/297	11-23-71	5	Virginia Tech	FA/98	15/14*
75	Ramirez, Tony (T)	6-6/296	1-26-73	2	Northern Colorado	D6/97	2/0
72	Roberts, Ray (T)	6-6/308	6-3-69	7	Virginia	FA/96	14/14
73	Roque, Juan (T)	6-8/333	1-6-74	2	Arizona State	D2a/97	13/1
62	Semple, Tony (G)	6-4/286	12-20-70	5	Memphis State	D5/94	16/1
71	Tharpe, Larry (T)	6-4/300	11-19-70	8	Tennessee State	FA/97	16/15

Defensive Linemen

63	Davis, Jerome (T)	6-4/275	3-4-74	1	Minnesota	FA/97	0/0
94	Elliss, Luther (T)	6-5/291	3-22-73	4	Utah	D1/95	16/16
67	Kirschke, Travis (T/E)	6-3/286	9-6-74	2	UCLA	FA/97	3/0
90	Owens, Dan (T)	6-3/290	3-16-67	9	USC	FA/98	15/15*
91	Porcher, Robert (E)	6-3/270	7-30-69	7	South Carolina State	D1/92	16/15
97	Scroggins, Tracy (E)	6-2/255	9-11-69	7	Tulsa	D2a/92	15/6
68	Sheahan, Kevin (T)	6-1/286	6-19-75	1	Carroll (Mont.)	FA/97	0/0
92	Spindler, Marc (T)	6-5/290	11-28-69	9	Pittsburgh	FA/97	10/0
98	Thomas, Marvin (E)	6-5/264	10-19-73	1	Memphis	FA/97	0/0
93	Waldroup, Kerwin (E)	6-3/260	8-1-74	3	Central State (Ohio)	D5/96	11/11

Linebackers

55	Aldridge, Allen	6-1/255	5-30-72	5	Houston	FA/98	16/15*
57	Boyd, Stephen	6-0/247	8-22-72	4	Boston College	D5a/95	16/16
53	Fredrickson, Rob	6-4/240	5-13-71	5	Michigan State	T-Oak/98	16/13*
50	Hanks, Ben	6-2/222	7-31-72	3	Florida	FA/97	2/0
58	Jamison, George	6-1/235	9-30-62	13	Cincinnati	FA/97	16/10
99	Jordan, Richard	6-1/245	12-1-74	2	Missouri Southern	FA/97	10/0
52	Kowalkowski, Scott	6-2/228	8-23-68	8	Notre Dame	FA/94	16/0
54	Russell, Matt	6-2/245	7-5-73	2	Colorado	D4/97	14/0

Defensive Backs

24	Abrams, Kevin (CB)	5-8/175	2-28-74	2	Syracuse	D2b/97	15/4
26	Alexander, Jamaal (S)	5-11/200	9-18-76	R	Southern Miss	D6/98	—
35	Bailey, Robert (CB)	5-9/174	9-3-68	8	Miami (Fla.)	FA/97	15/0
27	Carrier, Mark (S)	6-1/192	4-28-68	9	USC	FA/97	16/16
23	Fair, Terry (CB)	5-9/185	7-20-76	R	Tennessee	D1/98	—
31	Hill, Sean (S)	5-10/195	8-14-71	5	Montana State	FA/98	0/0*
25	Jeffries, Greg (CB)	5-9/184	10-16-71	6	Virginia	D6/93	15/2
38	Porter, Daryl (CB)	5-9/190	1-16-74	2	Boston College	FA/97	7/0
28	Rice, Ron (S)	6-1/206	11-9-72	4	Eastern Michigan	FA/96	12/8
38	Stewart, Ryan (S)	6-1/207	9-30-73	3	Georgia Tech	FA/97	8/0
32	Westbrook, Bryant (CB)	6-0/199	12-19-74	2	Texas	D1/97	15/14

Specialists

4	Hanson, Jason (K)	5-11/183	6-17-70	7	Washington State	D2b/92	16/0
18	Jett, John (P)	6-0/199	11-11-68	6	East Carolina	FA/97	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Tutu Atwell, WR/KR; Jon Blackman, TE; Kerlin Blaise, G; Lamar Campbell, S; Devon Coburn, C; Travis Colquitt, P; Kendrick Gholston, DE; Clifford Green, CB; Matt Hogg, G; Octavis Long, WR; Kevin O'Neill, LB; Travis Reece, FB; Clay Rush, K; Tawambi Settles, S; Michael Stuewe, WR; Kywin Supernaw, S; Corey Thomas, WR; Phillip Ward, LB; Cyril Weems, CB; Willie Whitehead, DE.

*—Not with Lions in 1997.

DETROIT OFFENSE

Sanders
Rivers

RB

Moore
Crowell

WR

Abrams
Jeffries

CB

Probable starters listed on top

Roberts
Ramirez

LT

Compton
Semple

LG

Scroggins
Waldroup

RE

Aldridge
Kowalkowski

MLB

Carrier
Jeffries

FB

(QB) Mitchell
Miller

(C) Pyne
Hempstead

QB

C

Owens
Spindler

RT

S. Boyd
Russell

MLB

Hartings
Beverly

RG

Elliss
Spindler

DT

Ellis
Spindler

DT

Rice
Stewart

SS

Vardell
Schlesinger

FB

Roque
Tharpe

RT

Porchner
Kirschke

LE

Fredrickson
Jamison

SLB

Sloan
Rasby

TE

Morton
T. Boyd

WR

Westbrook
Fair

CB

DETROIT DEFENSE

K: Hanson
P: Jett
KR: Battle, Fair
PR: Fair, Battle

GRAPHIC BY MIKE NYERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Allen Aldridge, OLB (FA/Broncos); Jim Pyne, C (FA/Bucs); Rob Fredrickson, OLB (trade/Raiders); Jim Miller, QB (FA/Falcons); Dan Owens, DT (FA/Falcons); Walter Rasby, TE (FA/Panthers).

Key losses: Shane Bonham, (FA/49ers); Reggie Brown, OLB (retired); Kevin Glover, C (FA/Seahawks); Van Malone, SS (FA/Cardinals); Pete Metzelaars, TE (retired); Glyn Milburn, WR (trade/Packers); Corey Raymond, CB (FA); Frank Reich, QB (retired); Mike Wells, DT (FA/Bears).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Terry Fair	CB	Tennessee
2nd	Germane Crowell	WR	Virginia
2nd	Charlie Batch	QB	Eastern Michigan
6th	Jamaal Alexander	S	Southern Miss
7th	Chris Liwienski	T	Indiana

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	None	
1994	WR Johnnie Morton	Starter with Lions
1995	DT Luther Elliss	Starter with Lions
1996	LB Reggie Brown	Forced to retire
	G Jeff Hartings	Starter with Lions
1997	CB Bryant Westbrook	Starter with Lions

Coaching Staff

Coach: Bobby Ross. **Offensive staff:** Sylvester Croom (offensive coordinator) • Frank Falks (running backs) • Jack Henry (offensive line) • Stan Kwan (offense/special teams) • John Misciagna (quality control/offense/administrative assistant) • Bob Palcic (tight ends) • Jerry Sullivan (wide receivers) • Jim

Zorn (quarterbacks). **Defensive staff:** Brian Baker (defensive line) • Don Clemons (defensive assistant/assistant strength coach) • Gary Moeller (linebackers) • Dennis Murphy (quality control/defense) • Larry Peccatiello (defensive coordinator) • Dick Selcer (defensive backs). **Others:** Bert Hill (strength and conditioning) • Chuck Prier (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 9-7 (T3rd in NFC Central); 6-2 in division; 7-5 in conference; 6-2 at home; 3-5 on road.

1997 playoff record: Lost to Buccaneers, 20-10, in NFC wild-card game.

Ross' regular-season record: 9-7 in one season with Lions; 56-40 overall in six seasons with Lions and Chargers.

Ross' postseason record: 3-4 overall in four appearances with Lions and Chargers (0-1 in Super Bowl).

Team record past five years: 43-37 (.538, ranks 10th in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1996

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*362.4	1	2
Rushing offense	*154	1	2
Passing offense	*208.4	5	12
Scoring offense	379	2	4
Total defense	*309.2	8	14
Rushing defense	*114.6	7	18
Passing defense	*194.6	10	13
Scoring defense	306	6	10
Takeaways	25	12	T22
Giveaways	28	7	T16
Turnover differential	-3	9	T19
Sacks	43	T7	T13
Sacks allowed	41	7	16

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

In 1997 Barry Sanders and Herman Moore became the first teammates in more than 40 years to lead the NFL in rushing yards and passes caught, respectively, in the same season.

Yr.	Team	Rush leader (total)	Receptions leader (total)	Team record
1997	Lions	Barry Sanders (2,053)	Herman Moore (104*)	9-7
1954	49ers	Joe Perry (1,049)	Billy Wilson (60†)	7-4-1

*Tied for league lead with Tim Brown.

†Tied for league lead with Pete Pihos.

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Green Bay	12:01
Sept. 13	CINCINNATI	1:01
Sept. 20	at Minnesota	12:01
Sept. 28	TAMPA BAY (Mon.)	8:20
Oct. 4	at Chicago	12:01
Oct. 11	Open date	
Oct. 15	GREEN BAY (Thur.)	8:20
Oct. 25	MINNESOTA	1:01
Nov. 1	ARIZONA	1:01
Nov. 8	at Philadelphia	1:01
Nov. 15	CHICAGO	8:20
Nov. 22	at Tampa Bay	1:01
Nov. 26	PITTSBURGH (Thanks.)	12:35
Dec. 6	at Jacksonville	1:01
Dec. 14	at San Francisco (Mon.)	5:20
Dec. 20	ATLANTA	1:01
Dec. 27	at Baltimore	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T5TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	ATLANTA	W	28-17
Sept. 7	TAMPA BAY	L	17-24
Sept. 14	at Chicago	W	32-7
Sept. 21	at New Orleans	L	17-35
Sept. 28	GREEN BAY	W	26-15
Oct. 5	at Buffalo	L	13-22
Oct. 12	at Tampa Bay	W	27-9
Oct. 19	N.Y. GIANTS (OT)	L	20-26
Oct. 26	Open date		
Nov. 2	at Green Bay	L	10-20
Nov. 9	at Washington	L	7-30
Nov. 16	MINNESOTA	W	38-15
Nov. 23	INDIANAPOLIS	W	32-10
Nov. 27	CHICAGO	W	55-20
Dec. 7	at Miami	L	30-33
Dec. 14	at Minnesota	W	14-13
Dec. 21	N.Y. JETS	W	13-10
Dec. 28	at Tampa Bay*	L	10-20

*NFC wild-card game.

Miscellaneous

Chairman: William Clay Ford.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Pontiac Silverdome (80,368, artificial).

Ticket information: 248-335-4151.

Flagship radio station: WXYT-AM, 1270.

Training site: Saginaw Valley State University, Saginaw, Mich.; 248-972-3700.



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

Moore has three consecutive 100-catch seasons and is one of the best receivers in the league. He and Johnnie Morton are a deadly duo.

ground. Run-stopping tackle Mike Wells signed with Minnesota, and the Lions picked up Dan Owens from Atlanta to replace him. While Owens is a better pass rusher and gives the line more versatility, he doesn't have the same bulk to stop the run.

There also are concerns at right end, where Tracy Scroggins and Kerwin Waldroup will platoon. They're good pass rushers, but they're undersized and vulnerable against the run.

The left side of the line is good and getting better. Luther Ellis is proving to be a force on the inside; he should start getting some Pro Bowl recognition. That status already has arrived for Robert Porcher, who had 12½ sacks last season and is getting better.

With Shane Bonham having signed with San Francisco, depth is a major concern. Marc Spindler is tough against the run, but the Lions have nothing but untested free agents on the outside.

LINEBACKERS—Both outside positions had to be filled in the offseason. Reggie Brown suffered a career-ending neck injury last year and the experiment of moving end Antonio London, a pass-rushing specialist, to linebacker was bagged. London was cut and signed with Green Bay.

Ross filled those voids by signing Denver free agent Allen Aldridge to replace Brown on the weakside. Aldridge played middle linebacker last season but has experience at all three positions.

On the strongside, Detroit traded a fourth-round pick to Oakland for Rob Fredrickson, who has been hampered by shoulder and heel injuries the past two seasons.

Middle linebacker should be solid with Stephen Boyd. Last year's fourth-round pick, Matt Russell, could push for the starting spot. Both are tough and instinctive against the run.

Depth isn't a concern on the outside. George Jamison and Scott Kowalkowski are dependable players, but neither can be expected to

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	B
Offensive backfield:	A	Linebackers:	C
Offensive line:	B	Secondary:	B
Receivers:	B+	Special teams:	C

play full time.

SECONDARY—The Lions should field their best defensive backfield in decades. But they'll be even better next year. That's because cornerbacks Bryant Westbrook and Kevin Abrams are going into their second season—Abrams only started four games last year—and key depth should come from first-round pick Terry Fair.

Westbrook played exclusively on the left side and Abrams on the right last season, but Ross is switching them back and forth to improve the depth in case of injury. Westbrook will stay mostly on the left side because he has the size and tenacity to play the run. Fair will step in immediately as the team's nickel back, with Greg Jeffries taking over as the dime back. Robert Bailey, who made some big plays last season, provides additional depth.

There are questions at safety, where Ron Rice's improved play knocked out Van Malone as the starting strong safety. The Lions didn't intend to re-sign Malone, who joined Arizona. The problem is that Rice has been injury-prone over his short career; when he's healthy, he has good speed and better instincts.

Mark Carrier played better at the end of last season than he did in the beginning, when a back injury limited his effectiveness. Jeffries will get a lot of time at safety to help improve the depth.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game is solid. Jason Hanson hit 24 consecutive field goals at one point last season and finished 26-of-29. Two of his three misses were from 50 yards or longer. Punter John Jett, who had 25 kicks downed inside the 20 and only four touchbacks, was strong in the first 10 games, then struggled.

A problem last season was punt returns. Glyn Milburn, who handled all of the return duties, was traded to the Packers. His kick returns were good; his punt returns subpar. One reason Fair was drafted in the first round (20th overall) was his ability to return punts. Expect him to contribute immediately at that position. Fair has not returned kickoffs, but will try it along with running back Terry Battle.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The Lions are notorious for their slow starts; if it happens again, they'll be out of the race for the division title early. They open on the road against Green Bay and face NFC opponents in six of their first seven games. They must do better than the 4-6 start they had last season or chances are they won't make it to the postseason.

The Lions do get a break in weeks 6-9, with a bye week and three consecutive home games. Alas, the season-ending stretch is not kind: Four of the last six games are on the road against playoff-caliber opponents. Detroit won five of its final six games last season to earn a wild-card berth, but the Lions can't count on that possibility this year.

BOTTOM LINE

Mitchell holds the key to this year's success—or lack thereof. If he can gain some consistency and the team can win early, the Lions have a shot at winning the division and getting home-field advantage. If they struggle and just manage to make the playoffs again, another first-round exit on the road can be expected.

Detroit's defense played surprisingly well last year, and if it maintains the same level, that unit is good enough to win. The kicking game is one of the best in the league, but with a new cast of return specialists, that area remains suspect.

TSN

Paula Pasche covers the Lions for the Oakland (Mich.) Press.



High-powered offense could mean Holmgren goes out with a bang

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 1st

BY TOM SILVERSTEIN

Maybe they've lost a lap on the rest of the field in the NFC. But is there anyone talented enough to dethrone the Packers and prevent them from becoming the first NFC team to go to three consecutive Super Bowls?

Sure, the defense was exposed for its age and inability to stop the run in the Super Bowl loss to the Broncos. And, sure, the problem was compounded by the loss of six free agents, including defensive starters Gabe Wilkins, Doug Evans and Eugene Robinson.

But coach Mike Holmgren, who will be seeking a second championship in what likely will be his final season with the Packers, has the offensive firepower to pick up the slack.

Three-time league MVP Brett Favre will guide what should be the Packers' most potent offense since he has been the starter. His biggest problem will be deciding whether to throw the ball to 1,000-yard receivers Antonio Freeman and Robert Brooks or hand it to 1,400-yard rusher Dorsey Levens.

COACHING

Holmgren has been given permission to seek a coach/G.M. position after this season, which means the likelihood of him returning for the final year of his contract in 1999 isn't good. More than a few teams will covet his services when the season is over, and despite having personnel man Ron Wolf to work with in Green Bay, Holmgren will jump at an opportunity to run his own team.

But a more pressing issue is how Holmgren will handle the distraction of being linked to every job opening in the league. And can he rule over a team that knows he's a lame-duck coach?

Luckily for Holmgren, he has an outstanding group of assistants to help him handle the operation. Offensive coordinator Sherman Lewis is a possible successor to Holmgren, and defensive coordinator Fritz Shurmur has almost total autonomy in running the defense.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Every year, Favre says don't expect him to throw as many touchdown passes as he did the season before. Well, his streak of at least 30 touchdown passes is up to a league-record four consecutive seasons, so there's no reason to think he won't do it again.

Favre's ultimate task this season may be to cut down on his mistakes, especially if the defense is going to be less reliable than in years past. After throwing an average of 13 interceptions from 1994-96, Favre threw 16 in '97, the primary reason his passer rating dipped under 95.0 for the first time since '94.

Telling Favre to gamble less when he leaves the pocket would be a mistake, as most of his interceptions don't occur in those situations. Where he needs improvement is in the early stages of the game, when his raging adrenaline often results in overthrows.

One thing the Packers can count on is Favre's accuracy in the red zone. Last year, his numbers near the end zone were staggering: 24 touchdowns, no interceptions and a passer rating of 108.2 when the offense was inside an opponents' 20. His ability to thread the needle in those situations separates him from the other quarterbacks in the league.

If Favre's string of consecutive regular-season starts is broken (93 entering the season), Doug Pederson becomes the starter. Pederson has quietly waited his turn to move up the ladder and looks to be a competent fill-in should he be forced into action.

RUNNING BACKS—Levens, the team's designated franchise player, is the undisputed starter after a Pro Bowl season in which he finished third in the league in total yards (1,805) behind Barry Sanders



As long as Favre's right arm is limber, you have to figure the Packers' offense will be as productive as any in the league.

and Terrell Davis. But Levens' status for training camp was undetermined because he said he wouldn't play for the franchise minimum of \$2.742 million and would like a long-term deal worth around \$5 million a year. In early June, negotiations had picked up and it appeared Levens would be signed before camp.

Holmgren would like to lighten some of Levens' load this year, but he doesn't have a lot of confidence in returning backups Aaron Hayden, Travis Jervy and Chris Darkins, who might go into camp as a defensive back. So, the team is looking to sign a quality backup such as Raymont Harris to improve the depth.

The fullback will be William Henderson, who became a valuable outlet receiver for Favre. And while Henderson isn't quite the blocking equivalent of Daryl Johnston, he will continue to be a valuable part of the running game.

The most intriguing addition to the backfield could be Glyn Milburn, whose speed and soft hands make him a prime candidate for third-down duty. He could be the game-breaker the team has lacked in the backfield since Holmgren arrived.

RECEIVERS—This should be the year Freeman emerges as one of the best receivers in the game. A lot will depend on if he can improve his concentration, which lapsed to the point he led the team with a dozen drops last season. Nevertheless, his production has been remarkable throughout his first three years in the league. And Freeman has become the go-to receiver in the offense, even though split end is not the offense's highlighted position.

Impacting on Freeman's performance will be a healthy Brooks, who started 16 games last season after being less than a year removed from a severe knee injury. The doctors feel Brooks will run better and be more durable than he was in '97, when he still managed 60 receptions.

How good this unit ultimately is depends on whether third-year man Derrick Mayes grows up. He has the best hands on the team and can be physical with defensive backs, but his conditioning hasn't always been the best, leaving him susceptible to injury. Bill Schroeder and Lee DeRamus could challenge for playing time, and rookie Corey Bradford probably will learn from the sideline.

If the Packers aren't able to add a veteran to their receiving corps, they can get along because of their strength at tight end. Mark Chmura went to the Pro Bowl for the second time in three years, and Jeff Thomason is a reliable backup. The wild card is Tyrone Davis, whose downfield speed reminds the coaching staff of Keith Jackson's.

LINE—Rookie left tackle Ross Verba allowed his share of knockdowns, but he gave up only 2½ sacks in 11 starts. Not coincidentally, the Packers established a club record for fewest sacks allowed in a season with 26. What's more, Verba improved his run blocking and wasn't a hindrance to a line that plowed open enough holes to allow the backs to average 4.2 yards per carry, tied for third-best in the NFC.

The unit's best player is right tackle Earl Dotson, who can be a powerful force in the running game and more than adequate against rushing ends. But center Frank Winters is the glue. He is an expert at recognizing defenses and making adjustments on the run.

The only change in the starting lineup will be at left guard, where untested youngsters Marco Rivera and Joe Andruzzi will battle for the spot left vacant when Aaron Taylor signed with San Diego. Don't underestimate Taylor's loss. That's why the Packers signed journeyman guard Doug Widell and want to bring back center/guard Jeff Dellenbach.

DEFENSE

LINE—The Packers need Reggie White to be more than just a part-time pass rusher if they're going to return to the Super Bowl. He still has plenty of talent left, and there are indications he can overcome the back pain that rendered him ordinary last year if he follows through with rigorous treatment and conditioning.

If White can't come back in at least a half-time role, the Packers are in trouble. They have a promising young lineman in first-round pick Vonnie Holliday, but he will be playing end for the first time since pre-season camp of his freshman year at North Carolina. Third-round pick Jonathan Brown is a true end, but he'll need to put on 20 pounds to be an every-down player in Shurmur's scheme.

After the two rookies, the choices for end are undersized pass rusher Keith McKenzie and castoffs Eric Curry, Vaughn Booker, Paul Frase and Dexter Nottage. It appears Holliday will replace Gabe Wilkins on the right side, and any combination of the others will line up on the left side. If it is White there, the inside tandem of Santana Dotson and Gilbert Brown will see less double-teams. Brown's presence is vital to the defense's success, but the coaches have not been able to coerce him into losing weight to increase his stamina.

LINEBACKERS—The linebackers failed the Packers in their Super Bowl loss to the Broncos, but

Green Bay Packers

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
4	Favre, Brett	6-2/225	10-10-69	8	Southern Miss	T-Alt/92	16/16
11	Hasselbeck, Matt	6-4/219	9-25-75	R	Boston College	D6b/98	—
17	McAda, Ronnie	6-3/205	3-6-74	1	Army	D7b/97	0/0
18	Pederson, Doug	6-3/216	1-31-68	6	Northeast Louisiana	FA/95	1/0

Running Backs

44	Darkins, Chris	6-0/210	4-30-74	2	Minnesota	D4/96	14/0
24	Hayden, Aaron	6-0/216	4-13-73	4	Tennessee	W/97	14/0
33	Henderson, William (FB)	6-1/249	2-19-71	4	North Carolina	D3b/95	16/14
32	Jervey, Travis	6-0/222	5-5-72	4	The Citadel	D5b/95	16/0
25	Levens, Dorsey	6-1/230	5-21-70	5	Georgia Tech	D5b/94	16/16
35	Watson, Edwin (FB)	6-0/229	9-29-76	R	Purdue	D7a/98	—

Receivers

82	Anderson, Ronnie	6-1/195	2-27-74	1	Allegheny (Pa.)	FA/97	0/0
85	Bradford, Corey	6-1/200	12-8-75	R	Jackson State	D5/98	—
87	Brooks, Robert	6-0/180	6-23-70	7	South Carolina	D3/92	15/15
89	Chmura, Mark (TE)	6-5/253	2-22-69	7	Boston College	D6/92	15/14
81	Davis, Tyrone (TE)	6-4/245	6-30-72	3	Virginia	FA/97	13/0
46	DeRamus, Lee	6-1/205	8-24-72	3	Wisconsin	FA/98	0/0*
86	Freeman, Antonio	6-1/194	5-27-72	4	Virginia Tech	D3d/95	16/16
80	Mayes, Derrick	6-0/205	1-28-74	3	Notre Dame	D2/96	12/3
30	Milburn, Glyn (KR)	5-8/177	2-19-71	6	Stanford	T-Det/98	16/1*
49	Preston, Roell (KR)	5-10/185	6-23-72	3	Mississippi	FA/98	1/0*
84	Schroeder, Bill	6-2/200	1-9-71	3	Wisconsin-La Crosse	FA/97	15/1
83	Thomason, Jeff (TE)	6-5/250	12-30-69	6	Oregon	FA/95	13/1
47	Wachholtz, Kyle (TE)	6-4/237	5-17-72	1	USC	D7a/96	0/0

Offensive Linemen

70	Andruzzi, Joe (G)	6-3/313	8-23-75	2	Southern Connecticut	FA/97	0/0
60	Davis, Robert (C)	6-3/288	12-10-68	3	Shippensburg (Pa.)	FA/97	7/0
67	Dellenbach, Jeff (C)	6-6/300	2-14-63	13	Wisconsin	FA/96	13/5
72	Dotson, Earl (T)	6-4/315	12-17-70	6	Texas A&I	D3/93	13/13
58	Flanagan, Mike (C)	6-5/290	11-10-73	2	UCLA	D3a/96	0/0
77	Michels, John (T)	6-7/304	3-19-73	3	USC	D1/96	9/5
62	Rivera, Marco (G)	6-4/295	4-26-72	2	Penn State	D6/96	14/0
63	Timmerman, Adam (G)	6-4/295	8-14-71	4	South Dakota State	D7/95	16/16
78	Verba, Ross (T)	6-4/299	10-31-73	2	Iowa	D1/97	16/11
74	Widell, Doug (G)	6-4/296	9-23-66	10	Boston College	FA/98	16/16*
64	Wilkerson, Bruce (T)	6-5/310	7-28-64	12	Tennessee	FA/96	16/3
—	Willig, Matt (T)	6-8/317	1-21-69	6	USC	FA/98	16/13*
52	Winters, Frank (C)	6-3/300	1-23-64	12	Western Illinois	PlanB/92	13/13

Defensive Linemen

—	Booker, Vaughn (E)	6-5/295	2-24-68	5	Cincinnati	T-KC/98	13/13*
93	Brown, Gilbert (T)	6-2/345	2-22-71	6	Kansas	W-Min/93	12/12
91	Brown, Jonathan (E)	6-4/270	11-28-75	R	Tennessee	D3/98	—
75	Curry, Eric (E)	6-6/275	2-3-70	6	Alabama	FA/98	6/1*
71	Dotson, Santana (T)	6-5/285	12-19-69	7	Baylor	FA/96	16/16
97	Frase, Paul (E)	6-5/267	5-5-65	10	Syracuse	T-Jax/97	9/0
96	Holliday, Vonnie (E/T)	6-5/300	5-20-76	R	North Carolina	D1/98	—
94	Kuberski, Bob (T)	6-4/295	4-5-71	4	Navy	D7/93	11/3
95	McKenzie, Keith (E)	6-3/255	10-17-73	3	Ball State	D7b/96	16/0
73	Nottage, Dexter (E)	6-4/280	11-14-70	4	Florida A&M	FA/98	1/0*
99	Smith, Jermaine (T)	6-3/289	2-3-72	2	Georgia	D4/97	9/0
92	White, Reggie (E)	6-5/304	12-19-61	14	Tennessee	FA/93	16/16

Linebackers

55	Harris, Bernardo	6-2/247	10-15-71	4	North Carolina	FA/95	16/16
50	Hicks, Anthony	6-1/242	3-31-74	2	Arkansas	D5/97	0/0
56	Hollinquest, Lamont	6-3/250	10-24-70	5	USC	FA/96	16/0
59	Joyner, Seth	6-2/245	11-18-64	13	Texas-El Paso	FA/97	11/10
53	Koonce, George	6-1/243	10-15-68	7	East Carolina	FA/92	4/0
57	London, Antonio	6-2/240	4-14-71	6	Alabama	FA/98	16/6*
51	Williams, Brian	6-1/240	12-17-72	4	USC	D3c/95	16/16

Defensive Backs

23	Blackmon, Roosevelt (CB)	6-1/180	9-10-74	R	Morris Brown (Ga.)	D4/98	—
36	Butler, LeRoy (S)	6-0/200	7-19-68	9	Florida State	D2/90	16/16
38	McElmurry, Blaine (S)	6-0/188	10-23-73	1	Montana	FA/97	0/0
38	McGarrahan, Scott (S)	6-1/204	2-12-74	R	New Mexico	D6a/98	—
28	Mullen, Roderick (CB/S)	6-1/204	12-5-72	4	Grambling State	D5/95	16/1
21	Newsome, Craig (CB)	6-0/190	8-10-71	4	Arizona State	D1/95	1/1
39	Prior, Mike (S)	6-0/208	11-14-63	13	Illinois State	FA/93	16/0
42	Sharper, Darren (S/CB)	6-2/205	11-3-75	2	William & Mary	D2/97	14/0
40	Terrell, Pat (S)	6-1/210	3-18-68	9	Notre Dame	FA/98	16/5*
37	Williams, Tyrone (CB)	5-11/195	5-31-73	3	Nebraska	D3b/96	16/15

Specialists

10	Conway, Brett (K)	6-2/192	3-8-75	2	Penn State	D3/97	0/0
7	Landeta, Sean (P)	6-0/215	1-6-62	13	Towson State	FA/98	10/0*
8	Longwell, Ryan (K)	5-11/185	8-16-74	2	California	W-SF/97	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Magic Benton, WR; Michael Blair, FB; Mike Bowman, WR; Keif Bryant, DT; Keaton Cromartie, LB; Jason Davis, P; Terrell Farley, S; Anthony Fogle, CB; Roger Harper, S; David Hoelscher, DE; Chris Hogue, P; Rick Kaczinski, C; Billy Lyon, DE; Anthony McKinney, FB; Delonte Perkins, WR; Emory Smith, FB; Jude Waddy, LB; Andrew Welsh, G.

*—Not with Packers in 1997.

Green Bay OFFENSE

WR Brooks Schroeder

LT Verba Michels

LG Rivera Andruzzi

QB Favre Pederson
(C) Winters Dellenbach

RG Timmerman Widell

RT Dotson Willig

TE Chmura Thomason

WR Freeman Mayes

CB T. Williams Mullen

RE Holliday McKenzie

DT Dotson Smith

NT Brown Kuberski

LE White Frase

CB Newsome Blackmon

Probable starters listed on top

WRB Williams Hollingquest

FS Sharper Terrell

MLB Harris Hicks

SS Butler Farley

SLB Joyner Koonce

HB Levens Hayden

FB Henderson Smith

K: Longwell
P: Landeta
KR: Milburn
PR: Preston

Green Bay DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE NYERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Vaughn Booker, DE (trade/Chiefs); Eric Curry, DE (FA/Bucs); Lee DeRamus, WR (FA/Saints); Sean Landeta, P (FA/Bucs); Antonio London, LB (FA/Lions); Glyn Milburn, RB/KR (trade/Lions); Roell Preston, WR/KR (FA/Falcons); Pat Terrell, S (FA/Panthers); Doug Widell, G (FA/Colts); Matt Willig, T (FA/Falcons).

Key losses: Edgar Bennett, RB (FA/Bears); Steve Bono, QB (trade/Rams); Mark Collins, CB (FA/Seahawks); Doug Evans, CB (FA/Panthers); Craig Hentrich, P (FA/Oilers); Darius Holland, DT (trade/Chiefs); Terry Mickens, WR (FA/Raiders); Eugene Robinson, S (FA/Falcons); Aaron Taylor, G (FA/Chargers); Gabe Wilkins, DE (FA/49ers).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Vonnie Holliday	DE/DT	North Carolina
3rd	Jonathan Brown	DE	Tennessee
4th	Roosevelt Blackmon	CB	Morris Brown (Ga.)
5th	Corey Bradford	WR	Jackson State
6th	Scott McGarrahan	S	New Mexico
6th	Matt Hasselbeck	QB	Boston College
7th	Ed Watson	RB	Purdue

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	LB Wayne Simmons	Starter with Chiefs
	S George Teague	Starter with Cowboys
1994	G Aaron Taylor	Starter with Chargers
1995	CB Craig Newsome	Starter with Packers
1996	T John Michels	Reserve with Packers
1997	T Ross Verba	Starter with Packers

Coaching Staff

Coach: Mike Holmgren. **Offensive staff:** Nolan Cromwell (wide receivers) • Sherman Lewis (offensive coordinator) • Tom Lovat (offensive line) • Andy Reid (quarterbacks) • Mike

Sherman (tight ends) • Harry Sydney (running backs).
Defensive staff: Larry Brooks (defensive line) • Ken Flajole (defensive assistant/quality control) • Jim Lind (linebackers) • Fritz Shurmur (defensive coordinator) • Bob Valesente (secondary). **Others:** Johnny Holland (special teams) • Kent Johnston (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 13-3 (1st in NFC Central); 7-1 in division; 10-2 in conference; 8-0 at home; 5-3 on road.

1997 playoff record: Defeated Buccaneers, 21-7, in NFC divisional playoff game; defeated 49ers, 23-10, in NFC championship game; lost to Broncos, 31-24, in Super Bowl.

Holmgren's regular-season record: 64-32 in six seasons with Packers.

Holmgren's postseason record: 9-4 in five appearances with Packers.

Team record past five years: 55-25 (.688, ranks T2nd in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1992.

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*350.9	2	4
Rushing offense	*119.3	7	12
Passing offense	*231.6	1	3
Scoring offense	422	1	2
Total defense	*301.7	5	7
Rushing defense	*117.3	9	20
Passing defense	*184.4	6	8
Scoring defense	282	4	5
Takeaways	32	4	T6
Giveaways	32	T10	T20
Turnover differential	0	8	17
Sacks	41	9	17
Sacks allowed	26	1	3

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

In addition to winning three consecutive MVP awards, Brett Favre has moved atop the NFL's career list for touchdown passes per game:

Player	TDs	Games	TDs/Games
Brett Favre	182	97	1.88
Dan Marino	385	215	1.79
Jim Kelly	237	160	1.48
Warren Moon	279	195	1.43
Joe Montana	273	192	1.42
Dan Fouts	254	181	1.40
Fran Tarkenton	342	246	1.39
Johnny Unitas	290	211	1.37
Dave Krieg	261	201	1.30
Jim Everett	203	158	1.28

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	DETROIT	12:01
Sept. 13	TAMPA BAY	12:01
Sept. 20	at Cincinnati	1:01
Sept. 27	at Carolina	1:01
Oct. 5	MINNESOTA (Mon.)	7:20
Oct. 11	Open date	
Oct. 15	at Detroit (Thur.)	8:20
Oct. 25	BALTIMORE	12:01
Nov. 1	SAN FRANCISCO	3:15
Nov. 9	at Pittsburgh (Mon.)	8:20
Nov. 15	at N.Y. Giants	4:15
Nov. 22	at Minnesota	12:01
Nov. 29	PHILADELPHIA	3:15
Dec. 7	at Tampa Bay (Mon.)	8:20
Dec. 13	CHICAGO	12:01
Dec. 20	TENNESSEE	12:01
Dec. 27	at Chicago	12:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 8TH

1997 Results

Sept. 1	CHICAGO	W	38-24
Sept. 7	at Philadelphia	L	9-10
Sept. 14	MIAMI	W	23-18
Sept. 21	MINNESOTA	W	38-32
Sept. 28	at Detroit	L	15-26
Oct. 5	TAMPA BAY	W	21-16
Oct. 12	at Chicago	W	24-23
Oct. 19	Open date		
Oct. 27	at New England	W	28-10
Nov. 2	DETROIT	W	20-10
Nov. 9	ST. LOUIS	W	17-7
Nov. 16	at Indianapolis	L	38-41
Nov. 23	DALLAS	W	45-17
Dec. 1	at Minnesota	W	27-11
Dec. 7	at Tampa Bay	W	17-6
Dec. 14	at Carolina	W	31-10
Dec. 20	BUFFALO	W	31-21
Jan. 4	TAMPA BAY*	W	21-7
Jan. 11	at San Francisco†	W	23-10
Jan. 25	Denver‡	L	24-31

*NFC divisional playoff game.

†NFC championship game.

‡Super Bowl 32.

Miscellaneous

President: Robert E. Harlan.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Lambeau Field (60,790, grass).

Ticket information: (920) 496-5719.

Flagship radio station: WTMJ, 620 AM.

Training site: St. Norbert College, West De Pere, WI (920) 496-5700.

management felt good enough about the talent to stand pat. The lone competition will be on the strongside between Seth Joyner—who says he'll be better in his second season in the scheme—and George Koonce.

The best player of the bunch is Brian Williams, who has shown flashes of being an impact player. He has great physical tools but needs to improve his anticipation and angle of pursuit.

Inside, Bernardo Harris has given the Packers a more physical presence, but in his first year as a starter, he was merely adequate. It's possible Koonce could return to the middle if Harris doesn't work out.

SECONDARY—Losing half the starters from a unit that didn't allow a passing touchdown in the final 35 quarters normally would border on catastrophic. But the Packers should be able to get along just fine with cornerback Craig Newsome and free safety Darren Sharper replacing departed free agents Evans and Robinson, respectively.

Sharper's performance will be critical; if he can't handle the position alone, playmaking strong safety LeRoy Butler will have to play away from the line of scrimmage and won't be as effective. Sharper doesn't have Robinson's savvy, but he has range and big-play ability.

The Packers are counting on Newsome to return at full strength from a torn ACL. He was a better player than Evans before his injury. He will play on the left side, allowing Tyrone Williams to move back to his natural position on the right.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Disgusted with the way their return game performed last year (five lost fumbles and no touchdowns), the Packers added Milburn and Roell Preston. Also in the mix as returners will be Schroeder, Mayes, Sharper, Bradford and Darkins. Bradford, who averaged 28.2 yards a kickoff return in college, could be a sleeper.

The kicking game features a battle between incumbent Ryan Longwell and Brett Conway, who was selected in the third round last year and deemed the kicker of the future but was injured. Odds are Longwell will win out after a solid season in which he made 80 per-

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	A-	Defensive line:	C-
Offensive backfield:	A	Linebackers:	C
Offensive line:	B	Secondary:	B-
Receivers:	B+	Special teams:	B-

cent of his field-goal attempts and proved good on kickoffs.

The loss of punter Craig Hentrich via free agency hurts. The Packers will try to make do with Sean Landeta.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

Schedules are never favorable for first-place teams, but the Packers will benefit in two areas. They play their first three division games at home. And they play three of their last five games at home, when temperatures likely will be frigid. Favre is 23-0 at home when the temperature is 35 degrees or below.

The middle of the schedule is brutal, with a November 1 home game against San Francisco, then three consecutive road games (Pittsburgh, the New York Giants and Minnesota). Should the Packers win their first four home games, they will attempt to break Miami's all-time record of 27 consecutive home victories in a game against the 49ers.

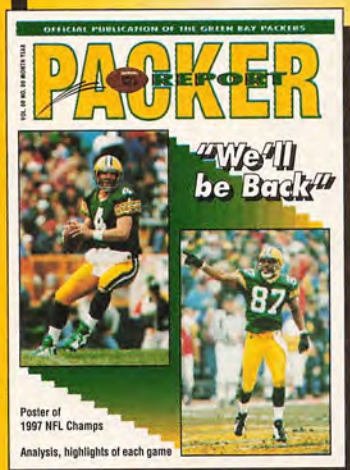
BOTTOM LINE

The Packers have fallen off from their Super Bowl-winning season of 1996, but the rest of the NFC still hasn't caught up. Though there are questions on defense and special teams, there appears to be too much talent on this team for it to be anything but a preseason favorite to challenge for a Super Bowl berth.

TSN

Tom Silverstein covers the Packers for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

VETERAN COVERAGE



Green Bay Packers

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A potentially potent offense could overshadow Vikings' turbulent times

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 3rd

BY DON BANKS

As wearied fans can readily attest, the Vikings defy easy summation these days. They are an odd blend of turbulence and talent, with nearly every recent positive counterbalanced by a negative.

On one hand, the Vikings are a perennial playoff contender, forcing their way into the postseason five of the past six seasons. On the other, they are fast becoming one of the NFL's standing punch lines, capable of more theatrics off the field than on it.

The Vikings raced to an 8-2 start last season, their best in 21 years. A midseason six-game winning streak was their finest since 1975. Then came a five-game losing streak, the longest of coach Dennis Green's six-year tenure.

They were both a playoff team and a fourth-place finisher, a first-round playoff upset winner at New York and an almost uncompetitive divisional-round loser at San Francisco, a dangerous offense and a porous defense.

And who could forget all the highs and lows: the complete uncertainty over the ownership situation; Green's controversial autobiography and his January bluff to resign; quarterback Brad Johnson's great showing before a season-ending neck injury; and the unexpectedly lavish free-agency spree—commitments of \$93.1 million to the team's top four free agents in a 75-day span.

COACHING

Green is nothing if not a survivor. He overcame a lot to earn a seventh season in Minnesota, most of it by his own doing.

Green's outrageous final chapter of his autobiography—which he released midseason with his team sailing along at 4-2—almost proved to be career suicide. The Vikings' 10 owners didn't quite appreciate Green's threat to sue for the right to buy controlling interest in the team.

When that finally quieted down, Green capped his wacky season by threatening to walk away from the final year of his contract if his deal was not extended. Team president Roger Headrick never blinked, Green did, and the marriage continues, albeit in a much-damaged state.

Now Green faces what finally appears to be his make-or-break season. The Vikings have spent to keep their stars, so if Green wants that contract extension, he must win now.

For his own sake, Green finally got the 0-4 playoff monkey off his back when the Vikings rallied for a 16-point comeback victory against the Giants, the franchise's first playoff win since 1988. The Vikings scored 10 points in the final 90 seconds, posting the fifth-biggest comeback in NFL playoff history, the biggest in team playoff history and the biggest by a playoff road team since 1972.

The big question: Does Green have one more big comeback in him?

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—After 10 games last season, Johnson looked like a league MVP candidate. After 13 games and season-ending neck surgery to repair a herniated disk, Johnson looked like a question mark.

Johnson's comeback has been incremental, with the biggest concern being the loss of strength in his throwing hand brought on by the neck injury. The Vikings are not panicking and say Johnson's return to starting form is expected by camp. But there is a risk. No NFL quarterback has had this surgery and returned, so there's no proven timetable.

Before the injury, Johnson exceeded all expectations. Through 12 games, he was second in the NFL in completions (260), third in passing yards (2,919) and fourth in touchdown passes (20). In addition, he continued his deft fourth-quarter work with three comeback victories.

Backup Randall Cunningham returned from NFL exile last year and proved handy, going 2-3 and winning a playoff game as the starter. But



Smith has been injury-prone, but the Vikings are banking on him (to the tune of \$25 million) becoming one of the NFL's elite backs.

he is not the player the team wants to bank its season on.

RUNNING BACKS—Robert Smith rewarded the team for its patience, posting a team-record 1,266-yard rushing season in 1997 after four injury-shortened years left some wondering if he ever would stay healthy enough to reach his potential. Then, the team rewarded Smith with a five-year, \$25 million deal.

Despite playing just 13½ games, Smith set four major team rushing records: 100-yard games in a season (six), season rushing average per carry (5.5) and consecutive carries without a fumble (352). The Vikings think he has a 1,500-yard season or two ahead of him. As always, health will be the key.

Partly because of Smith's season and partly because of his own struggles, backup Leroy Hoard was a disappointment last year. Some in the organization would like to see Moe Williams given the backup role, but the Vikings worry he fumbles too often. Third-down back David Palmer is almost exclusively a receiving option, and not a busy one at that, but fullback Charles Evans continues to find ways to contribute as a runner, receiver and blocker.

RECEIVERS—Isn't it always the rich who get richer? The drafting of talented but troubled Randy Moss should elevate this unit to the best in the business.

Moss is exactly the big, fast and athletic downfield threat the Vikings have sought since Qadry Ismail slumped after his 1994 career year. With Moss and Jake Reed on the outside and Cris Carter lined up in the slot, defenses must choose which player receives single coverage.

With Moss' addition, Reed and Carter might not extend their NFL

record of four consecutive dual 1,000-yard seasons—and still the unit could be improved. The team will go with three-receiver sets about 50 percent of the time.

At tight end, Andrew Glover flashed some big-play capability, although his hands are a 50-50 proposition. He offers Johnson a big target down the middle of the field and is the team's best pass-catching tight end in several years.

LINE—The Vikings were aggressive in the offseason, re-signing left tackle Todd Steussie and right guard David Dixon to long-term deals. Steussie joined perennial Pro Bowl pick Randall McDaniel (left guard) in Honolulu last year, and Dixon surprised many with his solid play.

The key will be the return of center Jeff Christy, who broke his ankle in two places in late November, beginning a revolving door at the position in the season's final weeks. Christy, the unsung leader of this unit, is expected back in time for camp.

Right tackle Corey Stringer enters the final year of his contract with the team still hoping he'll slim down from about 365 pounds to more like 340. Depth is a concern, but Christy's injury did reveal that guard/center Everett Lindsay can handle the important sixth-man role. The rest of the reserves are young and somewhat untested.

DEFENSE

LINE—The Vikings are well-stocked up front, but not necessarily set. There will be training-camp competition at three of the four positions, with only NFL sack leader John Randle going unchallenged at a tackle spot. Randle, who shifted to right end late last year with great results, is moving back inside, with an accompanying ripple effect.

The Vikings want Tony Williams, who was impressive as a rookie in the final four games at tackle, on the field as much as possible. He has speed to make plays in the backfield and is expected to push Jerry Ball at nose tackle. At right end, Derrick Alexander has arrived at his make-or-break season. He will vie for the starting role with Duane Clemons, who came on to post seven sacks as nickel rusher last season, which was second on the team behind Randle's 15½.

Left end comes down to Stalin Colinet, who finished his rookie season as a starter, and Fernando Smith, who had his 1997 ruined by a string of injuries. Give the nod to Smith if he can stay healthy and reproduce his 9½-sack performance of 1996. Run-stopping remains the challenge. The Vikings were 23rd against the run and need Ball or Williams to address that problem at the nose.

LINEBACKERS—The Vikings just didn't get enough production out of this unit last year, but they're hopeful the late-season changes will rectify that. The bright spot was rookie Dwayne Rudd, who finished with five sacks and was starting at weakside by season's end. He has the speed to track backs all over the field and got considerably stronger and broader in the chest and shoulders during the offseason.

Ed McDaniel was moved from the weakside to the middle, replacing Jeff Brady, but the question is whether McDaniel (5-11, 230) is big enough to take the wear and tear. McDaniel and strongside starter Dixon Edwards didn't make big plays in 1997, and Edwards especially fell off from his solid 1996 level.

Depth remains a concern, although the drafting of Stanford's Kailee Wong, North Carolina's Kivusama Mays and Arizona's Chester Burnett should ease some

Minnesota Vikings

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
8	Bouman, Todd	6-2/195	8-1-72	1	St. Cloud (Minn.)	FA/97	0/0
7	Cunningham, Randall	6-4/214	3-27-63	13	UNLV	FA/97	6/3
11	Fiedler, Jay	6-1/214	12-29-71	3	Dartmouth	FA/98	0/0*
14	Johnson, Brad	6-5/224	9-13-68	7	Florida State	D9/92	13/13

Running Backs

29	Evans, Chuck (FB)	6-1/243	4-16-67	6	Clark Atlanta	D11/92	16/13
44	Hoard, Leroy	5-11/223	5-15-68	9	Michigan	FA/96	12/1
33	Morrow, Harold	5-11/215	2-24-73	3	Auburn	W-Dal/96	16/0
22	Palmer, David (KR)	5-8/176	11-19-72	5	Alabama	D2/94	16/0
26	Smith, Robert	6-2/209	3-4-72	6	Ohio State	D1/93	14/14
21	Williams, Moe	6-1/200	7-26-74	3	Kentucky	D3/96	14/0

Receivers

45	Baynham, Grant (TE)	6-5/250	10-11-73	1	Georgia Tech	FA/97	0/0
84	Bland, Tony	6-3/213	12-12-72	2	Florida A&M	FA/96	2/0
80	Carter, Kris	6-3/216	11-25-65	12	Ohio State	W-Phi/90	16/16
85	DeLong, Greg (TE)	6-4/247	4-3-73	4	North Carolina	FA/95	16/3
87	Glover, Andrew (TE)	6-6/253	8-12-67	8	Grambling State	FA/97	13/11
87	Goodwin, Hunter (TE)	6-5/273	10-10-72	3	Texas A&M	D4/96	16/5
89	Hatchette, Matthew	6-2/195	5-1-74	2	Langston (Okla.)	D7b/97	16/0
18	Moss, Randy	6-4/194	2-13-77	R	Marshall	D1/98	—
19	Murphy, Yo	5-10/178	5-11-71	1	Idaho	FA/97	0/0
86	Reed, Jake	6-3/219	9-28-67	8	Grambling State	D3/91	16/16
83	Tate, Robert (KR)	5-10/187	10-19-73	2	Cincinnati	D6/97	4/0
81	Walsh, Chris	6-1/198	12-12-68	6	Stanford	FA/94	14/0

Offensive Linemen

75	Birk, Matt (T)	6-4/308	7-23-76	R	Harvard	D6/98	—
74	Bobo, Orlando (G)	6-3/296	2-9-74	2	Northeast Louisiana	FA/96	5/0
62	Christy, Jeff (C)	6-3/281	2-3-69	6	Pittsburgh	FA/93	12/12
69	Daniels, LeShun (G)	6-1/304	5-30-74	2	Ohio State	FA/97	1/0
71	Dixon, David (G)	6-5/352	1-5-69	5	Arizona State	FA/94	13/13
61	Lindsay, Everett (G/C)	6-4/290	9-18-70	5	Mississippi	D5/93	16/3
64	McDaniel, Randall (G)	6-3/279	12-19-64	11	Arizona State	D1/88	16/16
68	Morris, Mike (C)	6-5/283	2-22-61	12	NE Missouri State	FA/91	16/0
79	Moss, Eric (G/T)	6-4/325	9-25-74	1	Ohio State	FA/97	0/0
78	Sapp, Bob (G)	6-4/303	9-22-73	2	Washington	D3/97	1/0
73	Steussie, Todd (T)	6-6/321	12-1-70	5	California	D1b/94	16/16
77	Stringer, Corey (T)	6-4/353	5-8-74	4	Ohio State	D1/95	15/15

Defensive Linemen

90	Alexander, Derrick (E)	6-4/286	11-3-73	4	Florida State	D1a/95	14/14
96	Ball, Jerry (T)	6-1/320	12-15-64	12	SMU	FA/97	12/6
92	Clemons, Duane (E)	6-5/277	5-23-74	3	California	D1/96	13/3
99	Colinet, Stalin (E)	6-6/274	7-19-74	2	Boston College	D3/97	10/2
72	Fisk, Jason (T)	6-3/295	9-4-72	4	Stanford	D7b/95	16/10
93	Randle, John (T)	6-1/285	12-12-67	9	Texas A&I	FA/90	16/16
95	Smith, Fernando (E)	6-6/283	8-2-71	5	Jackson State	D2b/94	12/11
94	Williams, Tony (T)	6-1/291	7-9-75	2	Memphis	D5/97	6/2

Linebackers

56	Bercich, Pete	6-1/239	12-23-71	4	Notre Dame	D7/94	16/0
50	Burnett, Chester	5-10/226	4-15-75	R	Arizona	D7a/98	—
59	Edwards, Dixon	6-1/237	3-25-68	8	Michigan State	FA/96	16/16
55	Houston, Bobby	6-2/245	10-26-67	8	North Carolina State	FA/98	7/0*
53	Mays, Kivusama	6-3/244	1-7-75	R	North Carolina	D4/98	—
58	McDaniel, Ed	5-11/230	2-23-69	7	Clemson	D5/92	16/16
57	Rudd, Dwayne	6-2/245	2-3-76	2	Alabama	D1/97	16/2
54	Ulmer, Artie	6-2/243	7-30-73	2	Valdosta State	D7a/97	0/0
52	Wong, Kailee	6-2/267	5-23-76	R	Stanford	D2/98	—

Defensive Backs

30	Banks, Antonio (CB)	5-10/199	3-12-73	2	Virginia Tech	D4/97	0/0
43	Briggs, Greg (S)	6-3/215	10-1-68	5	Texas Southern	FA/97	14/0
31	Butler, Duane (S)	6-1/203	11-29-73	2	Illinois State	FA/97	3/0
20	Cooks, Kerry (S)	5-11/198	3-28-74	R	Iowa	D5/98	—
32	Darden, Tony (CB)	5-11/187	8-11-75	R	Texas Tech	D7b/98	—
27	Fuller, Corey (CB)	5-10/206	5-1-71	4	Florida State	D2/95	16/16
23	Gray, Torrian (S)	6-0/198	3-18-74	2	Virginia Tech	D2/97	16/3
24	Griffith, Robert (S)	5-11/198	11-30-70	5	San Diego State	FA/94	16/16
31	Hitchcock, Jimmy (CB)	5-10/188	11-9-71	4	North Carolina	T-ME/98	15/15*
34	McDonald, Ramos (CB)	5-11/195	4-30-76	R	New Mexico	D3/98	—
28	Phillips, Anthony (CB)	6-2/209	10-5-70	4	Texas A&M-Kingsville	FA/98	0/0*
42	Thomas, Orlando (S)	6-1/216	10-21-72	4	SW Louisiana	D2/95	15/13
25	Walker, Anthony (S)	6-0/200	12-6-73	1	Syracuse	FA/97	0/0

Specialists

1	Anderson, Gary (K)	5-11/178	7-16-59	17	Syracuse	FA/98	16/0*
17	Berger, Mitch (P)	6-2/218	6-24-72	3	Colorado	FA/96	14/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Obafemi Ayanbadejo, FB; Anthony Bass, CB; Corey Bridges, WR; Andy Cafilisch, P; Ryan Collins, TE; Todd Kurz, K; Claude Mathis, RB; Shawn Stuckey, LB; Cory Withrow, C.

*—Not with Vikings in 1997.

Minnesota OFFENSE

R. Smith
Hoard



(QB) Johnson
Cunningham
(C) Christy
Lindsay

Reed
Hatchette



Carter
Walsh



Steussie
E. Moss



R. McDaniel
Bobo



Dixon
Lindsay



Stringer
Sapp



Glover
DeLong



R. Moss
Tate



Hitchcock
McDonald



Alexander
Clemons



Randle
T. Williams



Ball
T. Williams



F. Smith
Colinet



Fuller
Butler



Rudd
Houston



E. McDaniel
Bericch



Edwards
Wong



Thomas
Gray



Griffith
Gray



Minnesota DEFENSE

K: Anderson
P: Berger
KR: Palmer
PR: Palmer

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Gary Anderson, K (FA/49ers); Jay Fiedler, QB (out of football since '96); Jimmy Hitchcock, CB (trade/Patriots); Bobby Houston, LB (FA/Chargers).

Key losses: Jeff Brady, LB (released/Panthers); Scott Dill, OL (retired); Ron George, LB (released/Chiefs); Eddie Murray, K (released); Anthony Prior, CB (released/Chiefs); Jay Walker, QB (released); Dewayne Washington, CB (FA/Steelers); Leonard Wheeler, CB (FA/Panthers).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Randy Moss	WR	Marshall
2nd	Kailee Wong	LB	Stanford
3rd	Ramos McDonald	CB	New Mexico
4th	Kivusama Mays	LB	North Carolina
5th	Kerry Cooks	S	Iowa
6th	Matt Birk	T	Harvard
7th	Chester Burnett	LB	Arizona
7th	Tony Darden	CB	Texas Tech

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	RB Robert Smith	Starter with Vikings
1994	CB Dewayne Washington	Starter with Steelers
	T Todd Steussie	Starter with Vikings
1995	DE Derrick Alexander	Starter with Vikings
	T Korey Stringer	Starter with Vikings
1996	DE Duane Clemons	Reserve with Vikings
1997	LB Dwayne Rudd	Starter with Vikings

Coaching Staff

Coach: Dennis Green. **Offensive staff:** Hubbard Alexander (receivers) • Dave Atkins (tight ends) • Brian Billick (offensive

coordinator) • Carl Hargrave (running backs) • Chip Myers (quarterbacks) • Mike Tice (offensive line). **Defensive staff:** Foge Fazio (defensive coordinator) • Andre Patterson (defensive line) • Tom Olivadotti (inside linebackers) • Richard Solomon (secondary) • Trent Walters (outside linebackers). **Others:** Steve Wetzel (strength and conditioning) • Gary Zauner (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 9-7 (T3rd in NFC Central); 3-5 in division; 6-6 in conference; 5-3 at home; 4-4 on road.

1997 playoff record: Defeated Giants, 23-22, in wild card game. Lost to 49ers, 38-22, in divisional game.

Green's regular-season record: 56-40 in six seasons with Vikings.

Green's postseason record: 1-5 in five playoff appearances with Vikings.

Team record past five years: 45-35 (.563, ranks T7th in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1995.

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*334.6	4	8
Rushing offense	*127.6	2	6
Passing offense	*207.1	6	14
Scoring offense	354	4	11
Total defense	*355.4	15	29
Rushing defense	*123.9	11	23
Passing defense	*231.5	15	29
Scoring defense	359	T10	T19
Takeaways	27	9	T17
Giveaways	22	3	T7
Turnover differential	5	4	T9
Sacks	44	T5	T10
Sacks allowed	33	T4	T9

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Cris Carter is the only receiver to average at least 100 receptions over the past five years:

Player, team	1993-97 receptions	Avg.
Cris Carter, Minnesota	523	104.6
Herman Moore, Detroit	466	93.2
Tim Brown, Oakland	447	89.4
Jerry Rice, San Francisco	440	88
Michael Irvin, Dallas	405	81
Shannon Sharpe, Denver	383	76.6
Carl Pickens, Cincinnati	365	73

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	TAMPA BAY	12:01
Sept. 13	at St. Louis	12:01
Sept. 20	DETROIT	12:01
Sept. 27	at Chicago	3:15
Oct. 5	at Green Bay (Mon.)	7:20
Oct. 11	Open date	
Oct. 18	WASHINGTON	12:01
Oct. 25	at Detroit	1:01
Nov. 1	at Tampa Bay	1:01
Nov. 8	NEW ORLEANS	12:01
Nov. 15	CINCINNATI	12:01
Nov. 22	GREEN BAY	12:01
Nov. 26	at Dallas (Thanks.)	3:05
Dec. 6	CHICAGO	7:20
Dec. 13	at Baltimore	4:15
Dec. 20	JACKSONVILLE	7:20
Dec. 26	at Tennessee (Sat.)	11:35

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 10TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Buffalo	W	34-13
Sept. 7	at Chicago	W	27-24
Sept. 14	TAMPA BAY	L	14-28
Sept. 21	at Green Bay	L	32-38
Sept. 28	PHILADELPHIA	W	28-19
Oct. 5	at Arizona	W	20-19
Oct. 12	CAROLINA	W	21-14
Oct. 19	Open date		
Oct. 26	at Tampa Bay	W	10-6
Nov. 2	NEW ENGLAND	W	23-18
Nov. 9	CHICAGO	W	29-22
Nov. 16	at Detroit	L	15-38
Nov. 23	at N.Y. Jets	L	21-23
Dec. 1	GREEN BAY	L	11-27
Dec. 7	at San Francisco	L	17-28
Dec. 14	DETROIT	L	13-14
Dec. 21	INDIANAPOLIS	W	39-28
Dec. 27	at N.Y. Giants*	W	23-22
Jan. 3	at San Francisco†	L	22-38

*NFC wild-card game.

†NFC divisional playoff game.

Miscellaneous

Chairman: John C. Skoglund.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Metrodome (64,035, artificial).

Ticket information: 612-828-6500.

Flagship radio station: WCCO-AM, 830.

Training site: Mankato State University, Mankato, Minn.; 612-828-6500.

worries. Wong, who played end in college, looks good as a nickel rusher and might push Edwards. Mays and Burnett will back up in the middle.

SECONDARY—If the defense is to improve as a whole, the biggest gains must be made by a secondary that ranked 29th against the pass in 1997. Cornerback was the team's crying need, but after three attempts to replace departed starter Dewayne Washington, a draft-day trade brought Jimmy Hitchcock from New England for a 1999 third-round pick.

How much of an upgrade Hitchcock provides remains to be seen, but he joins holdover left cornerback Corey Fuller. With virtually no depth behind those two, the team drafted New Mexico's Ramos McDonald in the third round and Texas Tech's Tony Darden in the seventh. Antonio Banks, a fourth-round pick last year, is also expected to vie for the nickel back role.

There are questions at safety, too. Free safety Orlando Thomas never really returned to form after blowing out a knee in a 1996 playoff game, and by season's end, he had lost his starting job to rookie Torrian Gray. The team hopes Thomas bounces back, but Gray could push his way into the starting picture. Strong safety Robert Griffith is a big hitter who rebounded to have a strong second half last year.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Vikings had to get younger at kicker, so they replaced 41-year-old Eddie Murray with 39-year-old Gary Anderson. Anderson, despite age taking some length off his leg, was more than reliable in the quagmire-like conditions of 3Com Park for San Francisco last year. Anderson hasn't played for a dome team and could be close to automatic from within 45 yards at home.

The punting is in decent shape. Mitch Berger overcame a preseason hip injury to post a 42.9-yard average (fifth in NFC), but his net was a very average 34.1. Berger's injury also curtailed his booming kickoffs, a chore he likely will again handle.

Return man Palmer really exploded midway into the season and wound up leading the NFC in punt returns (13.1). He also took over kickoff returns once rookie Robert Tate was hurt, contributing mightily with five kickoff returns of 41-plus yards in the final nine games.

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	B-
Offensive backfield:	B+	Linebackers:	C
Offensive line:	A	Secondary:	C-
Receivers:	A+	Special teams:	B

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

You've got to love being able to make the playoffs and still draw the softer-than-soft fourth-place schedule. Only one of the eight non-division foes (Jacksonville) made the playoffs in 1997, and only two had winning records (Jacksonville and Washington).

The Vikings have been fast starters the past two years, and they'll need a quick getaway again. Five of seven games are on the road after the home opener against Tampa Bay, and six of their first eight games are division matchups. There's also unfamiliar ground to charter in visiting three stadiums for the first time—St. Louis, Baltimore and Tennessee.

Minnesota's 10 dome dates and 12 games on turf bode well, as Green's teams usually have the edge in speed. If the team does survive the first half, a three-game homestand opens the second half. The toughest test is a quick November turnaround: a November 22 home game against Green Bay followed by a November 26 Thanksgiving trip to Dallas.

BOTTOM LINE

A tumultuous offseason hasn't obscured this: The Vikings are a healthy Brad Johnson away from fielding an offense to rival any in the NFL, with big-play weapons galore. If the secondary's shortcomings can be finessed, this team should settle for nothing less than a serious playoff run. With Green in the final year of his contract, it's now or never. **TSN**

Don Banks covers the Vikings for the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

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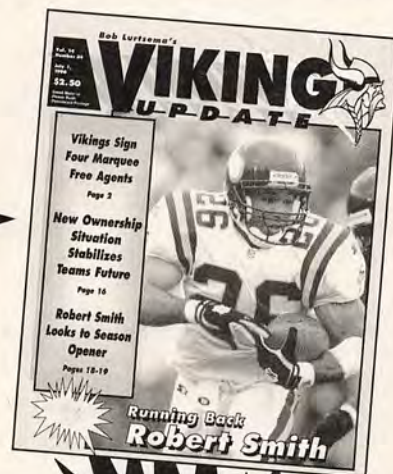
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After getting a taste of success, Dungy's Bucs left wanting more

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 2nd

BY PAT YASINSKAS

Whether he's running with the football or talking to reporters, Warrick Dunn has an uncanny ability to get straight to the point. Even in the final moments of last season, the Bucs' running back was laying the groundwork for the 1998 season.

"This is not the end," he said after a playoff loss to Green Bay. "This is just the beginning."

If last year was a start, Dunn and the Bucs could be in for another remarkable year. But they have a tough act to follow. Last season's 10-6 record marked the team's first winning season since 1982. And it was the Bucs' first playoff appearance since '82. Tampa Bay sent a league-high eight players to the Pro Bowl. After years of watching their team struggle, Bucs fans may be content. But coach Tony Dungy is not.

"We've still got a few steps to go before we get to where we want to be," he said. "We've taken some steps, but we can't say it's going to get any easier. The next step is tougher because it's a much bigger rung."

This season's goals include an NFC Central title and, maybe, a Super Bowl berth. But unlike in the past, those aren't just pipe dreams.

Dungy and general manager Rich McKay have assembled a talented roster and locked up most of the team's nucleus with long-term contracts. While free agency hurt other teams this offseason, it barely dented the Bucs. That helps assure they'll be competitive for years to come.

Pro Bowlers Warren Sapp, John Lynch, Trent Dilfer and Derrick Brooks have signed contract extensions within the last year. So did several other key contributors such as Brad Culpepper, Karl Williams and Jorge Diaz. And so did Dungy and McKay.

"You can win for a longer time developing your guys, getting a sense of family and trying to keep everybody together," Dungy said.

Throw in the team's one big splurge into free agency—wide receiver Bert Emanuel—and the Bucs could be even better than last year.

That one big, happy family will be moving to a new stadium this year, a new stadium that's opening next to the old one. It may be coincidence, but it all fits into the organization's philosophy. By continuing to look to the future, the Bucs finally have buried their dismal past.

COACHING

Dungy did what Leeman Bennett, Ray Perkins, Richard Williamson and Sam Wyche before him couldn't. He turned the Bucs into winners. It's no secret the arrival of owner Malcolm Glazer and a loosening of the team's purse strings has helped. But give most of the credit to the steady hand of Dungy, who after years of close calls for coaching jobs landed the right one in Tampa Bay.

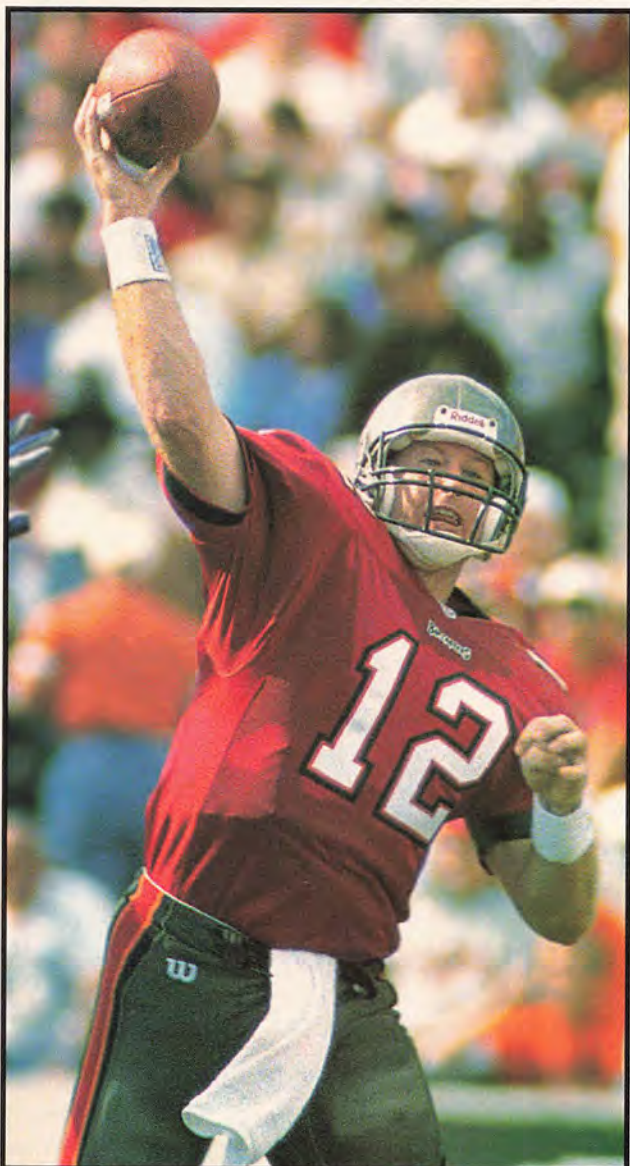
It's true opponents no longer take the Bucs for granted, but Dungy is not the type to let his team take anything for granted, anyway. Every move he has made since becoming coach two years ago has been a building block of some kind, and he's not about to let the team take a step backward.

Dungy is surrounded by a solid staff, led by defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin. With Emanuel's signing and a few other offensive additions, coordinator Mike Shula finally will have his hands untied, and that could lead to the next step in Dilfer's development. If it does, watch out, as a consistent passing game was the only thing that separated the Bucs from the NFL elite last year.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Dilfer made the Pro Bowl last season, but that doesn't mean he has shed all his critics. Even Dilfer admits there is plenty of room for improvement in his fifth season.

"We don't scare anyone," he said of a passing offense that ranked last in the league in 1997.



Dilfer has steadily improved, but he still is not among the league's elite. The Bucs hope added weapons help him reach his potential.

But Dilfer wants to change that and the front office has pitched in by upgrading the receiving corps. That could translate into a revamped offensive philosophy. Throughout his career, Dilfer's role has been to not lose games, rather than win them. That has to change if the Bucs are going to take another step.

The running game still will be the focus of the offense, but Dilfer has to stretch defenses by hitting deep passes. That was difficult with a weak receiving corps, but that's no longer an excuse. If Dilfer continues to improve, so will the Bucs.

Dilfer will be backed up by former 49ers reserve Jeff Brohm. Steve Walsh and third-year pro Scott Milanovich will battle for the No. 3 spot.

RUNNING BACKS—Dunn and fullback Mike Alstott might have been the league's best duo last season. The scary part is they're only

going to get better. Dunn led the team in rushing and receiving yards as a rookie, and the powerful Alstott, entering his third season, scored a team-high 10 touchdowns.

Although Alstott may be the league's best true fullback, his role is about to change. The plan is to lighten Dunn's load by using Alstott as an all-purpose back. At times, he will line up with Dunn. Other times, Alstott will be the sole back. He'll also be used at tailback with Lorenzo Neal as the lead blocker.

The bottom line is Alstott should get more than the 176 carries he had last season because he can wear down a defense. That is the perfect complement for Dunn's speed. Dunn's carries may not increase, but his production should. Dunn, who averaged 4.4 yards per carry last season, is at his best when his carries are limited to 12-15 a game.

Neal, who was picked up in a trade with the Jets, also could be a key figure. His presence will take some of the blocking load off Alstott. Neal also has good hands and should be a big plus in an offense that loves to use its backs as receivers.

RECEIVERS—For a team that's not a big believer in free agency, the Bucs sure made an exception at this position. Desperate for help in the passing game, the team spent \$16.4 million to lure Emanuel from Atlanta with a four-year deal. And if that wasn't enough, the team's first draft pick, a second-rounder, was spent on Jacquez Green, a big-play receiver from Florida. Suddenly, what was a weakness appears to be a strength.

Emanuel, who averaged 65 receptions a season in four years with the Falcons, gives the team something it sorely lacked: an experienced, productive receiver. He will step into the go-to role opposite second-year player Reidel Anthony. After an up-and-down rookie season, the team expects Anthony to develop into a deep threat.

Karl Williams, who started seven games last season, will be the third receiver. That role could take on added importance as the Bucs implement more three-receiver sets to open up the offense. Williams, who handled most of the return duties last year, should get a chance to focus more on his role as a receiver. Green, who is small but tough, will take over the return duties and be given time to develop as the fourth receiver.

The fifth spot will come down to a battle between Horace Copeland and Robb Thomas. After missing 1996 with a knee injury, Copeland was disappointing last year. But the team is hoping last season was just another part of the recovery process. If Copeland can return to form, he will jump up in the rotation.

After three mostly disappointing seasons, the team finally gave up on tight end Jackie Harris. His starting job will be inherited by long-time backup Dave Moore. One of Dilfer's favorite targets, Moore is a classic overachiever. What he lacks in size and speed he makes up for with instincts and intelligence. Moore is an adequate blocker, but his strength is as a receiver. Patrick Hape will be the backup, but he'll get a lot of playing time in blocking situations.

LINE—This unit was a pleasant surprise last season as the team averaged 120.9 yards a game on the ground and Dilfer was the benefactor of solid protection. Paul Gruber (left tackle) and Tony Mayberry (center) are the heart and soul of this group. It is crucial they remain healthy because the rest of the unit is young.

Second-year pro Frank Middleton moves into the starting job at right guard with Diaz switching to the

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	HT./WT.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
11	Brohm, Jeff	6-1/205	4-24-71	3	Louisville	FA/98	5/0*
12	Dilfer, Trent	6-4/234	3-13-72	5	Fresno State	D1/94	16/16
13	Milanovich, Scott	6-3/220	1-25-73	3	Maryland	FA/96	0/0
4	Walsh, Steve	6-3/215	12-1-66	10	Miami (Fla.)	FA/97	13/0

Running Backs

40	Alstott, Mike (FB)	6-1/248	12-21-73	3	Purdue	D2/96	15/15
28	Dunn, Warrick	5-8/176	1-5-75	2	Florida State	D1/97	16/10
37	Ellison, Jerry	5-10/204	12-20-71	3	UT-Chattanooga	FA/94	16/0
44	Lee, Steve (FB)	6-0/265	4-16-74	1	Indiana	FA/97	0/0
41	Neal, Lorenzo (FB)	5-11/240	12-27-70	6	Fresno State	T-NYJ/98	16/3*

Receivers

85	Anthony, Reidel	5-11/178	10-20-76	2	Florida	D1/97	16/12
49	Brady, Rickey (TE)	6-4/264	11-19-70	1	Oklahoma	FA/97	0/0
81	Carter, Nigae	6-1/196	9-1-74	1	Michigan State	D6b/97	0/0
88	Copeland, Horace	6-3/208	1-2-71	6	Miami (Fla.)	D4b/93	13/11
87	Davis, John (TE)	6-4/257	5-14-73	2	Emporia (Kan.) State	FA/97	8/2
80	Emanuel, Bert	5-10/180	10-28-70	5	Rice	FA/98	16/16*
	Green, Jacquez	5-9/172	1-15-76	R	Florida	D2a/98	—
82	Hape, Patrick (TE)	6-4/256	6-6-74	2	Alabama	D5/97	14/3
19	Hunter, Brice	6-0/219	4-21-74	1	Georgia	FA/96	3/0
48	Jordan, Andrew (TE)	6-4/254	6-21-72	5	Western Carolina	FA/97	4/0
83	Moore, Dave (TE)	6-2/242	11-11-69	6	Pittsburgh	FA/92	16/7
17	Simon, Geroy	6-0/183	9-11-75	1	Maryland	FA/97	0/0
84	Thomas, Robb	5-11/178	3-29-66	10	Oregon State	FA/96	16/1
86	Williams, Karl	5-10/174	4-10-71	3	Texas A&M-Kingsville	FA/96	16/8

Offensive Linemen

64	Diaz, Jorge (G)	6-4/308	11-15-73	3	Texas A&M-Kingsville	FA/96	16/16
65	Dogins, Kevin (C)	6-1/295	12-7-72	2	Texas A&M-Kingsville	FA/96	0/0
74	Gruber, Paul (T)	6-5/292	2-24-65	11	Wisconsin	D1/88	16/16
67	Mathews, Jason (T)	6-5/304	2-9-71	5	Texas A&M	FA/98	16/0*
61	Mayberry, Tony (C)	6-4/302	12-8-67	9	Wake Forest	D4/90	16/16
73	Middleton, Brian (G)	6-3/340	10-25-74	2	Arizona	D3a/97	15/2
62	Newnam, Frank (G)	6-3/296	2-11-74	2	Tulsa	FA/97	0/0
70	Odom, Jason (T)	6-5/307	3-31-74	3	Florida	D4a/96	16/16
69	Pierson, Pete (T)	6-5/295	2-4-71	3	Washington	D5/94	15/0
	Washington, Todd (C/G)	6-3/312	7-19-76	R	Virginia Tech	D4/98	—
71	Wunsch, Jerry (T)	6-6/333	1-21-74	2	Wisconsin	D2/97	16/0

Defensive Linemen

72	Ahanotu, Chidi (E)	6-2/283	10-11-70	6	California	D6/93	16/15
	Cannida, James (T)	6-2/275	1-3-75	R	Nevada	D6a/98	—
77	Culpepper, Brad (T)	6-1/275	5-8-69	7	Florida	W-MIN/94	16/16
96	DeGrate, Anthony (T)	6-1/333	5-24-74	1	Stephen F. Austin	D7/97	0/0
97	Jackson, Tyoka (T)	6-2/266	11-22-71	3	Penn State	FA/95	12/0
78	Jones, Marcus (E)	6-6/286	8-15-73	3	North Carolina	D1b/96	7/1
90	Maniecki, Jason (T)	6-4/291	8-15-72	3	Wisconsin	D5/96	10/0
	McCarty, Chance (E)	6-3/248	8-29-75	R	TCU	D7a/98	—
99	Sapp, Warren (T)	6-2/276	12-19-72	4	Miami (Fla.)	D1/95	15/15
91	Ushaw, Regan (E)	6-4/268	8-12-75	3	California	D1a/96	15/15
94	White, Steve (E)	6-2/265	10-25-73	3	Tennessee	FA/96	15/1

Linebackers

52	Bellisari, Greg	6-0/236	6-21-75	2	Ohio State	FA/97	14/0
55	Brooks, Derrick	6-0/235	4-18-73	4	Florida State	D1b/95	16/16
	Duncan, Jamie	6-0/244	7-20-75	R	Vanderbilt	D3/98	—
50	Gooch, Jeff	5-11/224	10-31-74	3	Austin Peay	FA/96	14/5
56	Nickerson, Hardy	6-2/230	9-1-65	12	California	FA/93	16/16
53	Quarles, Shelton	6-1/236	9-11-71	2	Vanderbilt	FA/97	16/0
51	Singleton, Alshermund	6-2/227	8-7-75	2	Temple	D4/97	12/0

Defensive Backs

21	Abraham, Donnie (CB)	5-10/190	10-8-73	3	East Tennessee State	D3/96	16/16
20	Barber, Ronde (CB)	5-10/186	4-7-75	2	Virginia	D3b/97	1/0
23	Bouie, Tony (S)	5-10/193	8-7-72	3	Arizona	FA/95	16/1
30	Harris, Al (CB)	6-0/185	12-7-74	1	Texas A&M-Kingsville	D6/97	0/0
	Kelly, Brian (CB)	5-11/195	1-14-76	R	USC	D2b/98	—
45	Legette, Tyrone (CB)	5-9/179	2-15-70	7	Nebraska	FA/96	16/1
47	Lynch, John (S)	6-2/214	9-25-71	6	Stanford	D3b/93	16/16
22	Mincy, Charles (S)	5-11/195	12-16-69	8	Washington	FA/96	16/9
27	Parker, Anthony (CB)	5-10/181	2-11-66	9	Arizona State	FA/97	15/14
24	Robinson, Damien (S)	6-2/210	12-22-73	2	Iowa	FA/97	0/0
	Smith, Shevin (S)	5-11/196	6-17-75	R	Florida State	D6b/98	—
31	Young, Floyd (CB)	6-0/170	11-23-75	2	Texas A&M-Kingsville	FA/97	12/1

Specialists

6	Barnhardt, Tommy (P)	6-2/228	6-11-63	12	North Carolina	FA/96	6/0
5	Husted, Michael (K)	6-0/190	6-16-70	6	Virginia	FA/93	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Rabih Abdullah, RB; Eric Anderson, OT; Kantray Barber, FB; Carlton Hall, LB; Lamont Hall, TE; Ralph Hughes, DE; Israel Ifeanyi, DE; Chad Kessler, P; Kendrick Lee, WR; Marvin Marshall, WR; Mike Ruhl, OT; Eric Vance, S; Donald Willis, G.
*—Not with Buccaneers in 1997.

BUCCANEERS

Tampa Bay OFFENSE

RB Dunn Ellison

QB (QB) Diller Brohm
(C) Mayberry Washington

FB Alstott Neal

WR Anthony Williams

LT Gruber Mathews

LG Diaz Washington

QB C

RG Middleton Washington

RT Odom Wunsch

TE Moore Hape

WR Emanuel Green

CB Abraham Barber

RE Upshaw Jones

T Sapp Maniecki

NT Culpepper Jackson

LE Ahanotu White

CB Parker Kelly

Tampa Bay DEFENSE

MLB Nickerson Duncan

SS Lynch Bouie

LLB Gooch Singleton

FS Mincy Robinson

RLB Brooks Quarles

K: Husted
P: Barnhardt
KR: Green, Williams
PR: Green, Williams

Probable starters listed on top

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Jeff Brohm, QB (FA/49ers); Bert Emanuel, WR (FA/Falcons); Jason Mathews, T (FA/Colts); Lorenzo Neal, FB (trade/Jets).

Key losses: Melvin Johnson, FS (trade/Chiefs); Rufus Porter, LB (released); Jim Pyne, G/C (FA/Lions); Errict Rhett, RB (trade/Ravens).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
2nd	Jacquez Green	WR	Florida
2nd	Brian Kelly	CB	USC
3rd	Jamie Duncan	LB	Vanderbilt
4th	Todd Washington	G	Virginia Tech
6th	James Cannida	DT	Nevada
6th	Shevin Smith	S	Florida State
7th	Chance McCarty	DE	TCU

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	DE Eric Curry	Reserve with Packers
1994	QB Trent Diller	Starter with Buccaneers
1995	DT Warren Sapp	Starter with Buccaneers
	LB Derrick Brooks	Starter with Buccaneers
1996	DE Regan Upshaw	Starter with Buccaneers
	DE Marcus Jones	Reserve with Buccaneers
1997	RB Warrick Dunn	Starter with Buccaneers

Coaching Staff

Coach: Tony Dungy. **Offensive staff:** Clyde Christenson (tight ends) • Chris Foerster (offensive line) • Tony Nathan (running backs) • Mike Shula (offensive coordinator) • Ricky Thomas (offensive assistant) • Charlie Williams (wide receivers).

Defensive staff: Herman Edwards (assistant head coach/defensive backs) • Monte Kiffin (defensive coordinator)

• Rod Marinelli (defensive line) • Kevin O'Dea (defensive assistant) • Lovie Smith (linebackers). **Others:** Mark Asanovich (strength and conditioning) • Aaron Komarek (assistant strength and conditioning) • Joe Marciano (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 10-6 (2nd in NFC Central); 3-5 in division; 7-5 in conference; 5-3 at home; 5-3 on road.
1997 playoff record: Defeated Lions, 20-10, in wild card game; lost to Packers, 21-7, in divisional game.

Dungy's regular-season record: 16-16 in two seasons with Buccaneers.

Dungy's postseason record: 1-1 in one appearance with Buccaneers.

Team record past five years: 34-46 (.425, ranks 19th in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1996.

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*273.5	14	29
Rushing offense	*120.9	6	11
Passing offense	*152.6	15	30
Scoring offense	299	T10	T23
Total defense	*289.1	3	3
Rushing defense	*101.1	3	6
Passing defense	*188	8	10
Scoring defense	263	1	2
Takeaways	26	T10	T19
Giveaways	23	T4	T11
Turnover differential	3	6	T12
Sacks	44	T5	T10
Sacks allowed	32	T2	T5

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

How good was the Bucs' defense in the red zone in 1997? The best in the league:

Team	OP*	TD	FG	TD%
Tampa Bay	38	14	13	36.8
Kansas City	42	16	17	38.1
Pittsburgh	54	22	25	40.7
Detroit	39	16	16	41.0
Buffalo	50	21	25	42.0
Miami	45	19	18	42.2
Seattle	42	18	19	42.9
New Orleans	53	24	22	45.3
St. Louis	41	19	13	46.3
N.Y. Jets	45	21	12	46.7

*Opponents' possessions in red zone.

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Minnesota	12:01
Sept. 13	at Green Bay	12:01
Sept. 20	CHICAGO	4:05
Sept. 28	at Detroit (Mon.)	8:20
Oct. 4	N.Y. GIANTS	4:15
Oct. 11	Open date	
Oct. 18	CAROLINA	1:01
Oct. 25	at New Orleans	12:01
Nov. 1	MINNESOTA	1:01
Nov. 8	TENNESSEE	8:20
Nov. 15	at Jacksonville	4:15
Nov. 22	DETROIT	1:01
Nov. 29	at Chicago	12:01
Dec. 7	GREEN BAY (Mon.)	8:20
Dec. 13	PITTSBURGH	1:01
Dec. 19	at Washington (Sat.)	4:05
Dec. 27	at Cincinnati	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T3RD.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	SAN FRANCISCO	W	13-6
Sept. 7	at Detroit	W	24-17
Sept. 14	at Minnesota	W	28-14
Sept. 21	MIAMI	W	31-21
Sept. 28	ARIZONA	W	19-18
Oct. 5	at Green Bay	L	16-21
Oct. 12	DETROIT	L	9-27
Oct. 19	Open date		
Oct. 26	MINNESOTA	L	6-10
Nov. 2	at Indianapolis	W	31-28
Nov. 9	at Atlanta	W	31-10
Nov. 16	NEW ENGLAND	W	27-7
Nov. 23	at Chicago	L	7-13
Nov. 30	at N.Y. Giants	W	20-8
Dec. 7	GREEN BAY	L	6-17
Dec. 14	at N.Y. Jets	L	0-31
Dec. 21	CHICAGO	W	31-15
Dec. 28	DETROIT*	W	20-10
Jan. 4	at Green Bay†	L	7-21

*NFC wild-card game.

†NFC divisional playoff game.

Miscellaneous

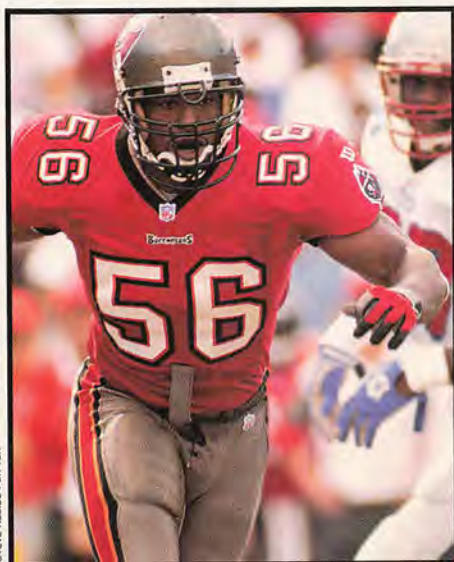
Owner: Malcolm Glazer.

Stadium (capacity, surface): name TBA (65,394, grass).

Ticket information: 813-879-2827.

Flagship radio station: WQYK-FM, 99.5.

Training site: University of Tampa, Tampa, Fla.; 813-253-6215.



Nickerson is the Bucs' leading tackler and one of the key players on what again should be an excellent defense.

left side to replace the departed Jim Pyne. Middleton's size should help the running game, but letting Pyne go via free agency could hurt the depth. Rookie Todd Washington could be forced into a lot of playing time as a backup at guard and center.

Jason Odom improved steadily last season and again will start at right tackle. But second-year man Jerry Wunsch will continue to get plenty of playing time. The long-term plan is to move Odom to the left side when Gruber eventually retires. Gruber still is going strong, but it might be time to start rotating tackles to prepare for the future.

DEFENSE

LINE—This unit is the key to the Dungy philosophy of defense, which focuses on speed. The team set a franchise record with 44 sacks last season, and no player was more responsible for that accomplishment than Sapp, who emerged as one of the league's best defensive players.

Sapp caused all sorts of problems for offensive lines as he led the team with 10½ sacks. But that number doesn't come close to telling how disruptive he can be. Sapp's presence was the main reason nose tackle Brad Culpepper and ends Chidi Ahanotu and Regan Upshaw each had the best seasons of their careers. As long as Sapp is around, they're capable of repeating those numbers.

But this group could be even better than last year because Sapp and Upshaw still are improving. Entering his third season, Upshaw has the tools to become the team's best pass rusher.

Backups Tyoka Jackson and Jason Maniecki will get a lot of playing time at tackle, but the most intriguing story on the line is Marcus Jones. After two disappointing seasons at nose tackle, Jones will get a fresh start at end. In Jones' defense, injuries have put a damper on his career. After ankle surgery, the former first-round draft pick comes into this season healthy. If Jones can show the potential he once flashed, this line could be frightening.

LINEBACKERS—Two of last year's three starters went to the Pro Bowl, and there's no question Hardy Nickerson and Brooks are the most dependable players on this defense. Their steady influence will be needed more than ever as the team breaks in a new starter at left outside linebacker.

Rufus Porter was waived after doing an adequate job there last season. The team decided to go with youth after Jeff Gooch, Alshermund Singleton and Shelton Quarles showed flashes of brilliance in backup roles. There's no clear-cut favorite, but the three-way battle should be the highlight of training camp.

Whichever player emerges should be in a good situation. Brooks and Nickerson have the quickness to compensate for mistakes. Nickerson went through last season without a true backup, but the team drafted Vanderbilt's Jamie Duncan (third round) to fill that role. Duncan was a tackling machine in a sophisticated scheme in college.

SECONDARY—With John Lynch and Charles Mincy as the safeties

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	A-	Defensive line:	A
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	A
Offensive line:	C+	Secondary:	C+
Receivers:	B-	Special teams:	B-

and Donnie Abraham at one cornerback, the team sincerely believes it is only one player away from having a dominant defensive backfield.

Finding that player is the tricky part. Anthony Parker held the starting job at one corner last season and was adequate. Parker again should open as the starter, but the Bucs want either rookie Brian Kelly or second-year player Ronde Barber to step up. Kelly may not have blazing speed, but his size could help him emerge as a good partner for Abraham. At 5-11, Kelly might be the best bet against NFC Central rivals, who feature a slew of large receivers.

Whoever plays the position is going to get tested because teams try to stay away from Abraham. But the Bucs play mostly zone, and Lynch and Mincy can help cover weaknesses. The Bucs also want to get promising second-year player Damien Robinson into the safety rotation.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Bucs have never returned a kickoff for a touchdown, but that dubious distinction could be in trouble with Green's arrival. He was a constant threat on returns in college, and his return ability was the main reason he was drafted. Anthony, Williams and Dunn shared return duties last year, but Green's arrival will allow them to concentrate on offense. Green and Williams will be deep on kickoffs, and Green will handle punts.

Kicker Michael Husted had a strong finish after a turbulent midseason. He has one of the league's strongest legs. But the real bright spot could be the return of punter Tommy Barnhardt. After getting off to the best start of his career last year, Barnhardt broke his collarbone in Week 6 and missed the rest of the season. If he picks up where he left off, the defense will be working with good field position.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

After having more than their share of fifth-place schedules, the Bucs have what could be the most challenging schedule in franchise history this year. The team hasn't played in a Monday night game since 1983 but will get two appearances this year.

The team's 5-3 road record last season showed it could win in hostile environments. That experience should come in handy, because the Bucs aren't going to see their new stadium for a while. It won't be ready until Week 3, putting the Bucs in the unique position of having to play all five exhibitions and their first two regular-season games on the road.

How well the team holds up could determine a lot. With the first four games against division opponents, a fast start is crucial. Keep in mind, a fast start was Dungy's theme last year, and the team began 5-0.

Last year's fast start was critical; it carried the team as it struggled down the stretch. A similar start this season could be a necessity because the final stretch won't be easy. The Bucs' final three road games are post-Thanksgiving games at Chicago, Washington and Cincinnati, games where the thermometer could become an important measuring stick for a franchise that hasn't won a game (0-17) when the game-time temperature is less than 40 degrees.

BOTTOM LINE

Make no mistake, last year was no fluke. The Bucs are for real. They have built a solid nucleus with a series of strong drafts and should be a playoff contender for years to come.

Still, the big question is whether they can take the next step. They made remarkable strides last year, but there was still a gap between Green Bay and Tampa Bay. If the Bucs can close it, they could be a legitimate Super Bowl contender.

TSN

Pat Yasinskas covers the Bucs for the Tampa Tribune.

There may have been questions about Fred Lane's ability to make it in the rugged, competitive world of the NFL before last season, but Lane figured he proved long ago he had what it takes.

He had the name with the college to match—Fred Lane from Division II Lane College in Jackson, Tenn. He had the speed and the statistics; in his sophomore and junior seasons, Lane ran for 3,612 yards and 33 touchdowns. And what about his toughness? Lane thought he proved that in high school in Franklin, Tenn., when he was hurled through his car's windshield in an accident that threatened his life (he still has a nasty scar on his forehead). Yet, two weeks after doctors told him he might never be able to run well enough to play sports again because of hundreds of glass particles imbedded in his left knee and leg, Lane competed in a state track meet.

He arrived at Lane College as a defensive back because he liked to hit people in high school, but he asked to be switched to running back because his head injury made him apprehensive. Lane thought he could better control the blows by running the ball. So it's ironic that in the NFL he is making his mark as a hard-driving runner with a no-nonsense style. He runs through people if needed, and his legs never stop churning until he hears the whistle or he's lying on the ground.

Last season, Lane used that approach to gain 809 yards on 182 carries as an undrafted free agent, replacing Anthony Johnson and Tshimanga Biakabutuka as Carolina's starting halfback. He scored seven touchdowns despite starting only the last seven games and carrying the ball as many as six times in only three of the first eight games.

"He's tough and strong and he's a hard, hard runner. He's a relentless runner, basically," says Vinny Cerrato, the 49ers' director of player personnel. "Now it's just a matter of him continuing to work hard. He's going to get better because he's going to know more of what it takes. I think he was playing last year more just on natural ability and instincts."

Panthers coach Dom Capers admits Lane was a pleasant surprise. "When a guy goes undrafted, it has been my experience that when they come in you may see their strengths right away," Capers says. "But you eventually start seeing holes in their game, reasons they went undrafted—whether it's their speed or they can't catch the ball or they can't handle things mentally. We kept watch-

Now, with one solid season under his belt, Lane hopes he can become the next Barry Sanders, his idol. "I know it's not an overnight thing to be like Barry Sanders. But I think I can be like him, maybe even one day be better than him," Lane says. "I've followed Barry Sanders since he played at Oklahoma State. He just always makes plays and has always seemed to be the kind of guy who can put the team on his shoulders and carry it. I'd like to be like that."

But Lane didn't arrive at his first minicamp with that seemingly cocky attitude. "Basically, coming in as an undrafted free agent, I thought I was being brought in just to be a practice dummy. That's the way I took it when I first got here," Lane says. "But then when I came back for training camp, I had a whole different attitude."

Fred Lane Sr., a former Tennessee State running back, had reminded his son that good things come to those who work hard. So Fred Jr. arrived at camp thinking he could be more than a practice dummy, that he could make the team and contribute.

Chick Harris, Carolina's running backs coach, started noticing Lane and became particularly impressed with Lane's quickness and cutting ability one afternoon when rain forced the Panthers to practice in a gym. "He showed balance that you just don't see every day, and he was trying to run at full speed on every snap," Harris says. "He just jumped out at you."

Harris walked over to Capers that day, pointed to Lane and said: "You know what? That guy right there is a football player." As simple as that might sound, it can be the ultimate coach-speak compliment.

"My goal is to be one of the top players in the league this season," Lane says. "I love to make plays and get the crowd loud. If I can't make

Undrafted free agent Fred Lane proves to be a big find for the Panthers

A hard ro

ing for those things with Fred, but they never came up."

Teams ignored Lane in the draft because he suffered a knee injury in his senior season that limited him to eight games and 821 yards. Only the Panthers and Steelers called after the draft.

plays and score touchdowns, then I think I shouldn't be on the football field."

TSN

Joe Menzer covers the Panthers for the Winston-Salem (N.C.) Journal

BUILDING ON ROOKIE SUCCESS

Chapter 2

ad to travel

STORY BY JOE MENZER
PHOTO BY BOB LEVERONE / TSN



After last season's success, offseason inaction will cost Falcons this season

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 4th

BY TONY FABRIZIO

In Dan Reeves' debut season as coach, the Falcons overcame a 1-7 start to enter the next-to-last weekend in playoff contention. They finished 7-9 despite a line that couldn't block for the run, a quarterback who failed to finish six games and a defense that didn't come on until late in the season. With such an encouraging performance in a transition year, what's to say a winning record isn't probable in 1998?

Actually, plenty. Perseverance can carry a team only so far. And the Falcons had a disappointing offseason. While most of the rest of the NFC West got better, they got worse. A team that needed to upgrade at offensive tackle, receiver and backup quarterback upgraded just one of those positions, as receiver Tony Martin was acquired. The defense has too many old players, and the draft doesn't appear to offer much immediate help after top pick Keith Brooking, a linebacker. One of the Falcons' most aggressive offseason move was to sign restricted free agent quarterback Eric Zeier to an offer sheet, which was matched by the Ravens. The team's only marquee defensive addition was safety Eugene Robinson, 35.

Although a year of experience in Reeves' smash-mouth offense should result in better execution, the team doesn't have the horses up front to take advantage of a nice corps of running backs. Barring some late maneuvering this summer after teams are forced to let veterans go for salary-cap reasons, the Falcons will be slightly less talented than they were last December.

COACHING

Reeves, 54, proved he still can teach and motivate, taking a team that was built for the run-and-shoot offense and molding it into something that eventually was quite credible. The team's seven victories were four more than it had in '96, which ended with June Jones' firing.

There are no shenanigans, no gimmicks under Reeves, the NFL's winningest active coach. The game is play for pay, and if you don't perform, he'll find somebody who will. The Falcons should continue to be more physical and better disciplined than they were in the run-and-shoot years. Reeves' offense may need some modernizing, but many of his principles—ingrained from his days under Tom Landry in Dallas—remain sound.

The staff includes three assistants who did outstanding jobs in '97: defensive coordinator Rich Brooks, the former Rams coach; defensive line coach Bill Kollar; and special teams coach Joe DeCamillis. In its first season under Brooks, the Falcons' defense registered a club-record 55 sacks and allowed 361 points, 104 fewer than the year before.

The offensive line is directed by Art Shell, the former Raiders coach, and that group will have to play better. Quarterbacks coach Jack Burns calls the plays, but he struggled last year trying to keep defenses off-balance.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—How many quarterbacks in history have started a season as badly as Chris Chandler did last year only to make the Pro Bowl? Not many, if any. After missing two starts and four other finishes in his first eight games, Chandler took virtually all of the snaps during the team's 6-2 second-half run. He finished as the NFL's No. 2-rated passer (behind Steve Young) with a career-high rating of 95.1. Chandler is a savvy 10-year veteran with better-than-average mobility and a nice touch on the deep ball. When surrounded with good players, he can be an upper-echelon talent.

Unfortunately, Chandler isn't durable. Certainly not durable enough



Yes, Chandler's injury problems are a concern. But when he played he was effective, as evidenced by his No. 2 ranking in passing efficiency.

to play in an offense that puts the quarterback in a lot of third-and-long situations. He never has played a full season without injury. Last year he missed time with two concussions, a high ankle sprain and a bruised sternum.

Mark Rypien was signed to be the backup after the Falcons were unable to land Zeier or Eagles free agent Ty Detmer, who signed with the 49ers. Rypien hasn't played much since 1995, and at nearly 36 he doesn't move very well. The wild card in the group is lefthander Tony Graziani, who started one game last year as a seventh-round pick out of Oregon. Reeves thinks he's a solid prospect, so Graziani could challenge for time if Chandler goes down.

RUNNING BACKS—Jamal Anderson is coming off back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons, but he may have to play well in the preseason to fend off second-year man Byron Hanspard. But both figure prominently in the offense no matter who starts.

Anderson is a special talent, a big man with grace, coordination and soft hands. The question: Can he run with the tackle-breaking force that a power offense demands? He did so only sporadically in '97, in part because of an ankle sprain that was slow to heal. Hanspard, on the other hand, won't break many tackles, but he's an explosive open-field runner who had three rushes of more than 50 yards despite carrying the ball only 53 times last year. If he overcomes a penchant for fumbling, he'll get more opportunities. Third-down back Harold Green, himself a former 1,000-yard man, could start in a pinch.

Fullback Bob Christian is a decent blocker, and he'll occasionally

catch the ball as well.

RECEIVERS—The Falcons acquired Tony Martin, a Pro Bowler in 1996, from the Chargers in June for a second-round pick. Martin should prove to be an effective complement to Terance Mathis. Martin should become Chandler's favorite receiver, filling the shoes of departed free agent Bert Emanuel. Martin's arrival means the Falcons' decision not to match the Bucs' offer to Emanuel, the team's leading receiver last year, won't be as big.

Though a gritty competitor and a nice complementary receiver, Mathis isn't fast enough, tall enough or durable enough to be any team's main threat; thus, the trade for Martin. Todd Kinchen, who has started two games in a six-year career, could open as the starter opposite Mathis. Kinchen's main competition through mid-June was rookie Jammi German, a third-round pick out of Miami who hasn't suited up for a game since 1995 because of injuries and a one-year suspension. Castoffs Mercury Hayes and Keith Crawford also will vie for playing time, but neither will keep opposing defensive coordinators up all night with worry.

The situation is a little brighter at tight end, where O.J. Santiago returns after breaking his leg in the 11th game last year. Santiago was having a solid rookie season until his injury.

LINE—Left tackle Bob Whitfield is the team's best lineman, and even he is coming off an inconsistent season. But he's reliable, having started 80 consecutive games.

Gene Williams, Robbie Tobeck and Calvin Collins also return, although each will be challenged in camp. Tobeck and Collins will swap positions, with Tobeck moving to center and Collins to left guard.

The only newcomer almost certain to start is tackle Corey Louchiey, a free agent from Buffalo. Still, Reeves admits having reservations about him. Louchiey started only 13 of 45 games in three seasons with the Bills, who have had their own line problems of late. But the Falcons' coaches are counting on Louchiey's upside—he's 26 years old and 6-8, 305—so they'll give him a shot at right tackle, where Antone Davis and Matt Willig failed last year.

Matt Elliott, a free agent from Carolina; Dave Widell, a free agent from Jacksonville; and second-round pick Bob Hallen of Kent also figure into the mix. Elliott will compete at guard, Widell offers depth at right tackle and center and Hallen will be tried first at center. The best that can be said about the line is that it's a work in progress.

DEFENSE

LINE—The Falcons' 55 sacks ranked second in the NFL (behind New Orleans) mostly because of the play of starting linemen Chuck Smith, Travis Hall, Dan Owens and Lester Archambeau. Owens signed with Detroit as a free agent, but Smith, Hall and Archambeau return after career years. Smith led the team with 12 sacks, Hall had 10½ and Archambeau nearly doubled his career best with 8½. None of the three has made the Pro Bowl and none is considered a dominant player, but what each of them have is a love for the game that is evident on every down. No one is more fun to watch than Smith when he's getting the best of a blocker.

Owens probably won't be adequately replaced at right tackle unless Nathan Davis, a '97 second-round pick who bombed as a rookie, comes through. He got into only two late-season games last year. Shane

Atlanta Falcons

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
12	Chandler, Chris	6-4/225	10-12-65	11	Washington	T-Ten/97	14/14
13	Graziani, Tony	6-2/195	12-23-73	2	Oregon	D7/97	3/1
11	Rypien, Mark	6-4/225	10-2-62	13	Washington State	FA/98	5/0*

Running Backs

32	Anderson, Jamal	5-11/234	9-30-72	5	Utah	D7/94	16/15
44	Christian, Bob (FB)	5-11/230	11-14-68	7	Northwestern	FA/97	16/12
45	Downs, Gary	6-1/212	6-6-72	5	North Carolina State	FA/97	16/0
28	Green, Harold	6-2/222	1-29-68	9	South Carolina	FA/97	16/1
40	Grenier, Geoff (FB)	6-2/240	1-25-73	1	Oklahoma State	FA/97	0/0
24	Hanspard, Byron	5-10/198	1-23-76	2	Texas Tech	D2b/97	16/0
33	Oxendine, Ken	6-1/228	10-4-75	R	Virginia Tech	D7b/98	—

Receivers

82	Crawford, Keith	6-2/195	11-21-70	5	Howard Payne (Texas)	FA/98	15/2*
83	Dwight, Tim (KR)	5-8/184	7-13-75	R	Iowa	D4b/98	—
87	German, Jammi	6-1/187	7-4-74	R	Miami	D3/98	—
84	Hayes, Mercury	5-11/195	1-1-73	3	Michigan	FA/97	6/0
89	Kinchen, Todd	5-11/187	1-7-69	7	LSU	FA/97	16/0
85	Kozlowski, Brian (TE)	6-3/255	10-4-70	5	Connecticut	FA/97	16/5
	Martin, Tony	6-0/181	9-5-65	9	Mesa State (Colo.)	T-SD/98	16/16*
81	Mathis, Terance	5-10/185	6-7-67	9	New Mexico	FA/94	16/16
88	Santiago, O.J. (TE)	6-7/267	4-4-74	2	Kent	D3/97	11/11
49	Saxton, Brian (TE)	6-6/265	3-13-72	3	Boston College	FA/97	3/0
86	Smith, Ed (TE)	6-4/253	6-5-69	2	None	FA/97	5/1
80	Thomal, Kevin	6-2/186	11-28-74	1	SMU	FA/97	0/0
83	West, Ed (TE)	6-1/250	8-2-61	14	Auburn	FA/97	12/3

Offensive Linemen

71	Adams, Scott (G/T)	6-5/315	9-28-66	8	Georgia	FA/97	6/0
68	Collins, Calvin (G/C)	6-2/307	1-5-74	2	Texas A&M	D6/97	15/13
53	Elliott, Matt (G/C)	6-3/295	10-1-68	6	Michigan	FA/98	16/6*
64	Hallen, Bob (C)	6-4/292	3-9-75	R	Kent	D2/98	—
72	Louchiey, Corey (T)	6-8/305	10-10-71	4	South Carolina	FA/98	16/6*
55	Miller, Nate (G)	6-3/310	10-8-71	2	LSU	FA/95	13/0
74	Salaam, Ephraim (T)	6-7/290	6-19-76	R	San Diego State	D7a/98	—
67	Schreiber, Adam (C/G)	6-4/298	2-20-62	15	Texas	FA/97	16/0
61	Tobeck, Robbie (C/G)	6-4/300	3-6-70	5	Washington State	FA/93	16/15
70	Whitfield, Bob (T)	6-5/310	10-18-71	7	Stanford	D1a/92	16/16
79	Widell, Dave (C/T)	6-7/312	5-14-65	10	Boston College	FA/98	16/12*
69	Williams, Gene (G)	6-2/315	10-14-68	8	Iowa State	T-Clev/95	15/15

Defensive Linemen

92	Archambeau, Lester (E)	6-5/275	6-27-67	9	Stanford	T-GB/93	16/16
91	Burrough, John (E)	6-5/275	5-17-72	4	Wyoming	D7/95	16/1
95	Campbell, Mark (E)	6-1/293	9-12-72	3	Florida	FA/98	5/0*
99	Davis, Nathan (T)	6-5/312	2-6-74	2	Indiana	D2a/97	2/0
75	Dronett, Shane (T)	6-6/288	1-12-71	7	Texas	FA/97	16/1
60	Fontaine, Jamal (E)	6-3/240	1-29-71	2	Washington	FA/97	3/0
98	Hall, Travis (T)	6-5/288	8-3-72	4	Brigham Young	D6/95	16/16
77	Slay, Henry (T)	6-2/290	4-28-75	R	West Virginia	D7c/98	—
90	Smith, Chuck (E)	6-2/265	12-21-69	7	Tennessee	D2/92	16/15
98	Tuaoilo, Esera (T)	6-3/276	7-11-68	6	Oregon State	FA/98	6/1*

Linebackers

97	Bennett, Cornelius	6-2/238	8-25-65	12	Alabama	FA/96	16/16
51	Brandon, David	6-4/238	2-9-65	12	Memphis State	FA/96	4/4
56	Brooking, Keith	6-2/244	10-30-75	R	Georgia Tech	D1/98	—
94	Crockett, Henri	6-2/251	10-28-74	2	Florida State	D4/97	16/10
54	Hamilton, Ruffin	6-1/238	3-2-71	3	Tulane	FA/97	13/0
52	Sauer, Craig	6-1/240	12-13-72	3	Minnesota	D6/96	16/1
50	Sutter, Eddie	6-3/239	10-3-69	7	Northwestern	FA/97	16/0
59	Talley, Ben	6-3/248	7-14-72	3	Tennessee	FA/98	0/0*
58	Tuggle, Jessie	5-11/230	4-4-65	12	Valdosta (Ga.) State	FA/87	16/15

Defensive Backs

47	Bayne, Chris (S)	6-1/205	3-22-75	2	Fresno State	D7/97	13/0
43	Bolden, Juran (CB)	6-2/201	6-27-74	3	Mississippi Delta CC	D4b/96	14/1
20	Booker, Michael (CB)	6-2/203	4-27-75	2	Nebraska	D1/97	15/2
23	Bradford, Ronnie (CB)	5-10/188	10-1-70	6	Colorado	FA/97	16/15
27	Brown, Omar (CB)	5-10/200	3-28-75	R	North Carolina	D4a/98	—
34	Buchanan, Ray (S)	5-9/195	9-29-71	6	Louisville	FA/97	16/16
25	Bush, Devin (S)	5-11/210	7-3-73	4	Florida State	D1/95	16/16
29	Fuller, Randy (CB)	5-10/175	6-2-70	5	Tennessee State	FA/98	12/3*
22	McGill, Lenny (CB)	6-1/202	5-31-71	5	Arizona State	T-GB/96	15/0
41	Robinson, Eugene (S)	6-1/197	5-28-63	14	Colgate	FA/98	16/16*
35	White, William (S)	5-10/205	2-19-66	11	Ohio State	FA/97	16/16
21	Williams, Elijah (CB)	5-10/181	8-20-75	R	Florida	D6/98	—
48	Wimberly, Marcus (S)	5-11/192	7-8-74	2	Miami (Fla.)	D5/97	6/0

Specialists

5	Andersen, Morten (K)	6-2/225	8-19-60	17	Michigan State	FA/95	16/0
4	Stryzinski, Dan (P)	6-2/200	5-15-65	9	Indiana	FA/95	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

David Akers, K; Jeremy Akers, OT; Corey Allen, WR; Octavus Barnes, WR; Brian Brennan, QB; Michael Edwards, OT; Jason Evans, DT; Darren Fisk, FB; Chad Freeman, DE; Ben Huff, DT; Kevin Johnson, LB; Van Johnson, WR; Fred Lester, FB; Jody Littleton, LB; Barry Mitchell, DE; Jose Portilla, OT; Shawn Swayda, DE; Brad Trout, S; Clay Williams, OT.

*—Not with Falcons in 1997.

FALCON

Atlanta
OFFENSEAnderson
Hanspard(QB) Chandler
Rypien
(C) Tobeck
HallenChristian
GrenierK: Andersen
P: Stryzinski
KR: Hanspard, Dwight
PR: Dwight, KinchenMathis
KinchenWhitfield
MillerCollins
Elliott

QB

Williams
AdamsLouchiey
WidellSantiago
KozlowskiMartin
GermanBradford
BookerSmith
BurroughDronett
DavisMatt
TuaoloArchambeau
BurroughBuchanan
FullerBennett
SauerTuggle
CrockettWhite
BayneBrooking
BrandonProbable starters
Top backupsRobinson
BushAtlanta
DEFENSE

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Keith Crawford, WR (FA/Rams); Matt Elliott, G/C (FA/Panthers); Randy Fuller, CB (FA/Steelers); Corey Louchiey, OT (FA/Bills); Tony Martin, WR (trade/Chargers); Eugene Robinson, FS (FA/Packers); Mark Rypien QB (FA/Rams); Ben Talley, LB (FA/Giants); Esera Tuaolo, DT (FA/Jaguars); Dave Widell, C/T (FA/Jaguars).

Key losses: Antone Davis, OT (FA); Bert Emanuel, WR (FA/Buccaneers); Michael Haynes, WR (FA); Matt Willig, OT (FA/Packers).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Keith Brooking	LB	Georgia Tech
2nd	Bob Hallen	C/G	Kent
3rd	Jammi German	WR	Miami (Fla.)
4th	Omar Brown	S	North Carolina
4th	Tim Dwight	WR/KR	Iowa
6th	Elijah Williams	CB	Florida
7th	Ephraim Salaam	T	San Diego State
7th	Ken Oxendine	RB	Virginia Tech
7th	Henry Slay	DT	West Virginia

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	G/T Lincoln Kennedy	Starter with Raiders
1994	None	
1995	S Devin Bush	Reserve with Falcons
1996	None	
1997	CB Michael Booker	Reserve with Falcons

Coaching Staff

Coach: Dan Reeves. **Offensive staff:** Jack Burns (quarterbacks) • James Daniel (tight ends) • George Sefcik (offensive coordinator/running backs) • Art Shell (offensive line) • Rennie Simmons (wide receivers) • Ed West (offensive quality

control). **Defensive staff:** Don Blackmon (linebackers) • Rich Brooks (assistant head coach/defensive coordinator) • Bill Kollar (defensive line) • Ron Meeks (secondary) • Brian Xanders (defensive quality control). **Others:** Joe DeCamillis (special teams) • Tim Jergensen (assistant strength and conditioning) • Al Miller (strength and conditioning)

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 7-9 (T2nd in NFC West); 4-4 in division; 5-7 in conference; 3-5 at home; 4-4 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Reeves' regular season record: 7-9 in one season with Falcons; 148-115-1 overall in 17 seasons with Falcons, Giants and Broncos.

Reeves' postseason record: 8-7 overall in seven appearances with Giants and Broncos (0-3 in Super Bowls).

Team record past five years: 32-48 (.400, ranks 21st in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1995.

1997 Team Rankings	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*294.8	10	23
Rushing offense	*102.7	10	19
Passing offense	*192.1	11	22
Scoring offense	320	6	18
Total defense	*319.1	13	20
Rushing defense	*104.1	4	8
Passing defense	*215	13	20
Scoring defense	361	12	21
Takeaways	28	8	T15
Giveaways	24	6	T13
Turnover differential	4	5	11
Sacks	55	2	2
Sacks allowed	54	13	26

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

Chris Chandler was the NFL's top-rated quarterback in the red zone last season:

Quarterback	Red-zone rating
Chris Chandler, Atlanta	121.1
Boomer Esiason, Cincinnati	120.8
Brad Johnson, Minnesota	109.0
Brett Favre, Green Bay	108.2
Jake Plummer, Arizona	106.6
Drew Bledsoe, New England	104.4
Steve Young, San Francisco	104.3
Gus Frerotte, Washington	103.6
Jim Harbaugh, Indianapolis	98.8
Neil O'Donnell, N.Y. Jets	96.5

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at Carolina	1:01
Sept. 13	PHILADELPHIA	1:01
Sept. 20	Open date	
Sept. 27	at San Francisco	1:15
Oct. 4	CAROLINA	1:01
Oct. 11	at N.Y. Giants	8:20
Oct. 18	NEW ORLEANS	1:01
Oct. 25	at N.Y. Jets	1:01
Nov. 1	ST. LOUIS	1:01
Nov. 8	at New England	1:01
Nov. 15	SAN FRANCISCO	1:01
Nov. 22	CHICAGO	1:01
Nov. 29	at St. Louis	12:01
Dec. 6	INDIANAPOLIS	1:01
Dec. 13	at New Orleans	12:01
Dec. 20	at Detroit	1:01
Dec. 27	MIAMI	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: 22ND.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Detroit	L	17-28
Sept. 7	CAROLINA	L	6-9
Sept. 14	OAKLAND	L	31-36
Sept. 21	at San Francisco	L	7-34
Sept. 28	DENVER	L	21-29
Oct. 5	Open date		
Oct. 12	at New Orleans	W	23-17
Oct. 19	SAN FRANCISCO	L	28-35
Oct. 26	at Carolina	L	12-21
Nov. 2	ST. LOUIS	W	34-31
Nov. 9	TAMPA BAY	L	10-31
Nov. 16	at St. Louis	W	27-21
Nov. 23	NEW ORLEANS	W	20-3
Nov. 30	at Seattle	W	24-17
Dec. 7	at San Diego	W	14-3
Dec. 14	PHILADELPHIA	W	20-17
Dec. 21	at Arizona	L	26-29

Miscellaneous

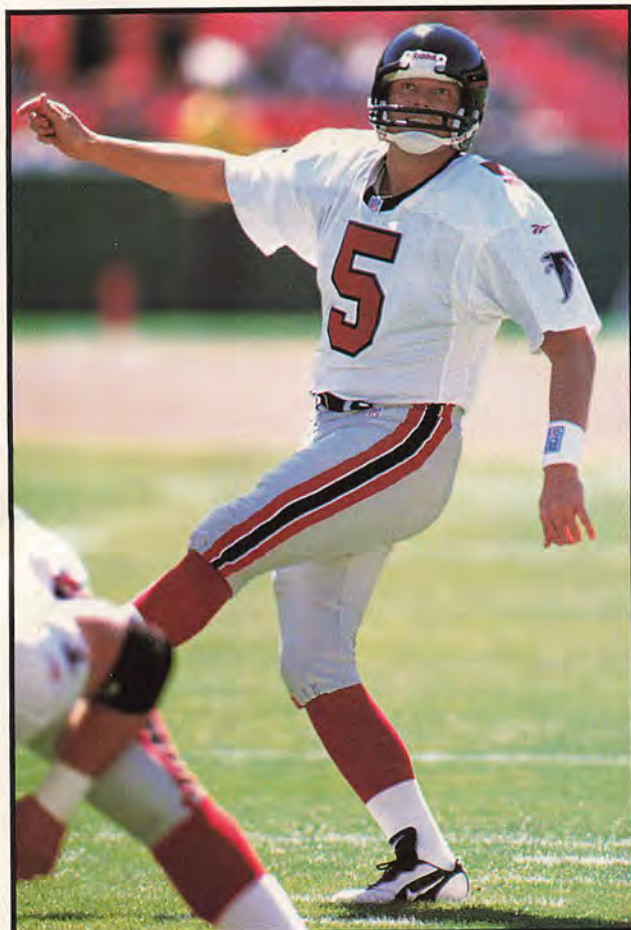
President: Taylor Smith.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Georgia Dome (71,228, artificial).

Ticket information: 404-223-8444.

Flagship radio station: WGST-AM, 920.

Training site: Atlanta Falcons complex, Suwanee, Ga.; 770-945-1111.



When it comes to leg strength, Andersen takes a back seat to no one. He's a major reason the Falcons have top-notch special teams.

Dronett, a key backup last year, is the likely starter. Esera Tuaolo, a fringe player who played briefly for Jacksonville last season, is the other reserve. John Burrough provides depth at end behind Smith and Archambeau.

LINEBACKERS—Middle linebacker Jessie Tuggle was the only Falcons defender to make the Pro Bowl, although he wasn't the most deserving. Truthfully, Tuggle has lost a step and become a liability against the pass. This will be his 12th season, and it is doubtful he'll play much longer.

Cornelius Bennett also enters his 12th season, and though he had a productive season (seven sacks, 115 tackles), he'll have to answer questions about his mental and physical condition after serving jail time on sexual abuse charges during the offseason.

Brooking, the 12th overall selection out of Georgia Tech, could slide into the strongside spot. Even if he doesn't start—David Brandon and Henri Crockett are the other options—Brooking will contribute because of his ability to defend against the pass. The coaches would like to move Crockett, who started 10 games last year as a rookie at the strongside spot, to the middle to apprentice behind Tuggle. Craig Sauer and Ben Talley will compete for backup work.

SECONDARY—Robinson will provide at least short-term help in a unit that showed marked improvement last year, but still lacked consistency at safety. Robinson played 11 years in Seattle and the past two in Green Bay, so he knows all the tricks. He will tutor youngsters Chris Bayne, Marcus Wimberly and Omar Brown, and he'll try to help Devin Bush, a '95 first-round pick who hasn't lived up to expectations. William White, another veteran with double-digit seasons (10), returns as the starting strong safety.

No personnel move paid off more last year than the signings of free-agent cornerbacks Ray Buchanan and Ronnie Bradford. After a so-so

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	B-
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	C
Offensive line:	C-	Secondary:	C+
Receivers:	D	Special teams:	A

start, the two gave the Falcons the first respectable pass defense they've had in five years. Buchanan and Bradford combined for 29 passes defended and nine interceptions.

The cornerback position should be stronger this year because Michael Booker, a '97 first-rounder who showed only flashes as a rookie, returns with 15 games' worth of experience. Former Steelers nickel back Randy Fuller was signed to add depth.

SPECIAL TEAMS

If the Falcons aren't good anywhere else, they will be exceptional on special teams. The kicking, punting and return games should be among the best in the league. Kicker Morten Andersen was resigned, and though he'll be 38 by the start of the season, he still possesses one of the strongest legs in the league. Punter Dan Stryzinski also signed a new deal after helping the team lead the NFL in punt coverage last year.

Hanspard, who had 93- and 99-yard touchdown returns last season, will handle the kickoff returns again. The Falcons couldn't have asked for more from Hanspard, who averaged 24.7 yards per return and had the third most all-purpose yards (1,375) among NFL rookies last season.

The punt returner probably will be rookie receiver Tim Dwight, who led the nation in punt returns at Iowa last year. The Falcons have several players whose forte is special teams, including Dronett, who has blocked seven field goals in his career, and Crawford, who was the Rams' special teams captain last year.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

After starting 0-8 in 1996 and 0-5 last year, the Falcons face another early gauntlet. They open on the road for the fifth time in six years, and three of the first four games are against NFC West favorites Carolina (twice) and San Francisco. The next game is no breather, either—a trip to New York for a Sunday night game against the Giants, whom Reeves coached from 1993-96.

On balance, though, the schedule isn't particularly daunting. The cumulative record of the Falcons' 16 opponents is 122-132-2, statistically the ninth-easiest schedule in the league. Just six games are against '97 playoff teams. For better or worse, the final seven games will be played indoors. The only potential bad-weather game comes November 8, at New England.

The Falcons' season may well be defined by how many wins they can rack up in a nine-game stretch from October 18 to December 13. During that span, they play two games each against the Rams and Saints, plus home games against Indianapolis and Chicago.

BOTTOM LINE

Reeves' mission is to build a franchise capable of sustained success. That may explain why the team wasn't more aggressive in the offseason. Why spend millions in signing bonuses on one or two players when they might only help in the short term?

The problem is the Falcons need to win now to build fan support and generate revenues for future signings. They also need to show improvement to lure potential free agents. That will happen in '98 only if Chandler stays relatively injury-free, the offensive line blocks better for Anderson and Hanspard, and a couple of surprises emerge from the draft. Right now, the Falcons aren't very good on paper, and they may be a couple of injuries away from being dismal.

TSN

Tony Fabrizio covers the Falcons for the Morris News Service/Atlanta.



Capers rebuilds his defense in hopes of re-creating the magic spirit of '96

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 2nd

BY JOE MENZER

Dom Capers built his coaching reputation on the defensive side of the ball. That's why the performance of his team in general and his defense in particular embarrassed him last season.

His zone-blitz concept—executed from a 3-4 base defense—was the talk and envy of the league two seasons ago. Last year, though, that scheme failed miserably. There were several reasons, and Capers has taken steps to address them.

- He beefed up an aging and thin defensive line through free agency and the draft.

- He brought back outside linebacker Kevin Greene despite a public outcry against it because he knew Greene's absence caused a domino effect that the defense never recovered from last year.

- He overpaid to land defensive lineman Sean Gilbert (\$46.5 million over seven years) and cornerback Doug Evans (\$22.5 million over five years) because he believed they were two of the best players available on the market.

On offense, which is not Capers' area of expertise, he was smart enough to hire Gil Haskell as coordinator after wisely permitting former coordinator Joe Pendry to leave for the Bills. Haskell, the former Packers receivers coach, is a student of the West Coast offense who plans to open up the passing game.

All the offseason moves add up to one thing: Capers expects this year's team to perform like the one that went 12-4 and was one victory away from the Super Bowl in 1996. He wants to expunge memories of last year's team, which went 7-9 and failed to make the playoffs.

COACHING

Capers, entering his fourth season, has proven he can coach. Two years ago, he won numerous coach of the year awards, but now he has added pressure for which he can only blame himself. He has labeled last year's finish "unacceptable" and has made it clear that his goal remains a Super Bowl victory.

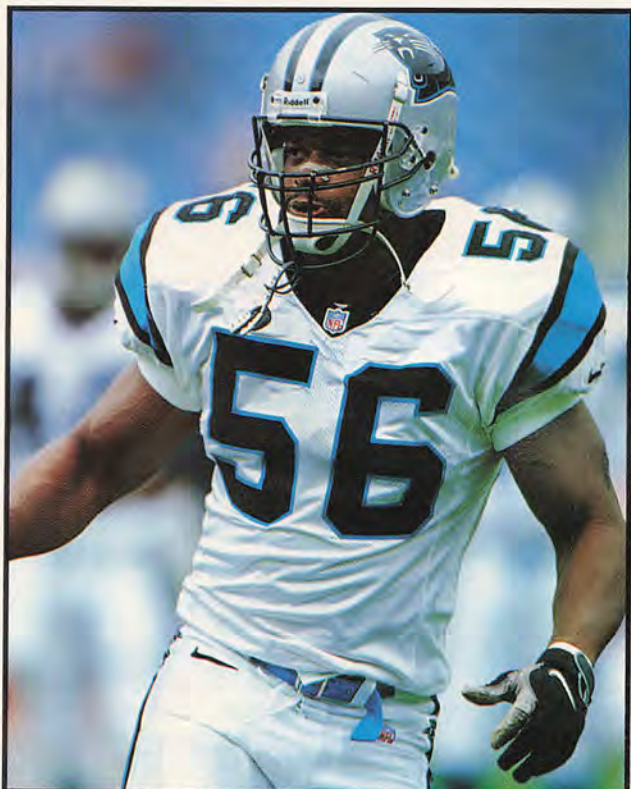
This will be the first season he has had a chance to do it almost exclusively with players he insisted on acquiring. When Bill Polian resigned as general manager to become president of the Colts two days after the end of last season, Capers almost immediately took on the added responsibilities of being the organization's top talent evaluator. He's the guy who spearheaded all the high-profile free-agent acquisition efforts. As such, Capers will have no one to blame but himself if the team struggles.

The offense will be left mostly in the hands of Haskell, who received high marks in Green Bay for his work with wide receivers such as Antonio Freeman and Robert Brooks and with running back Edgar Bennett. This should result in a vast improvement over the unimaginative attack of Pendry, who didn't always see eye-to-eye with quarterback Kerry Collins.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Collins is coming off a disastrous year in which he led the NFL in interceptions with 21 and lost the respect of many teammates who openly questioned his ability to lead. It cost him where it hurts today's player most: in the wallet.

The Panthers declined to pay a \$6 million bonus to buy back the final three years of what would have been a six-year, \$21.6 million contract he signed as a rookie in 1995, costing Collins \$12.23 million in guaranteed income. Instead, he will play this year for \$1.153 million and can become an unrestricted free agent after the season. Capers can't think of a better motivational tool, and he's gambling that Collins will play well enough to cash in. Then Capers gladly will ante up what-



Barrow struggled a bit in his first year with the Panthers. One reason was that he had to play outside; he'll move back inside this season.

ever it takes to keep him in the fold; if Collins falters, Capers simply will let him walk away.

Steve Beuerlein remains a capable backup and might benefit more from Haskell's new scheme than Collins. In the past, Beuerlein has been more effective in quick three- and five-step drop passing schemes than Collins, although neither is as mobile as a team running this system would prefer. The pressure will be on Collins to perform from the outset. The coaches won't hesitate to go with Beuerlein if Collins continues to make wrong reads and ill-advised throws.

Battling for the No. 3 spot are Shane Matthews and rookie free agent Dameyune Craig, who might make the team as a specialist who doubles as a Kordell Stewart-type substitute around the goal line.

RUNNING BACKS—Rookie free agent Fred Lane burst onto the scene last season and supplanted 1996 first-round pick Tshimanga Biakabutuka and former 1,000-yard rusher Anthony Johnson as the starting running back. Lane's best quality is his ability to stay on his feet after taking the initial hit and keep driving.

Lane should benefit from the offseason acquisition of former 49er William Floyd, one of the game's best blocking fullbacks. Floyd's style is similar to that of Howard Griffith, the starter in 1995 and '96 who was missed dearly last season after departing for the Broncos via free agency. Like Greene on defense, Floyd is an intense player who is expected to bring passion and a will to win to the offense.

Biakabutuka, Johnson and third-down specialist Winslow Oliver can only hope to find some kind of role in Haskell's new offense, which often utilizes receivers out of the backfield. Then again, Floyd is expected to catch most of the balls thrown to the backs.

RECEIVERS—Wesley Walls, a Pro Bowl selection at tight end the past two seasons, remains the top threat. But Haskell plans to spread the wealth, and that means young receivers Rae Carruth and Muhsin Muhammad must step up.

Carruth's 44 catches as a rookie last season were second on the team to Walls' 58. Carruth has good speed but had trouble getting open at times. This is a make-or-break season for Muhammad. After his first two seasons were cut short by nagging injuries, he must prove he can stay healthy and be the big target who consistently makes tough catches in traffic.

The No. 3 receiver could be Mark Carrier, though the team re-signed Raghib Ismail and will have him compete with Carrier. Three others who may figure in the mix are draft choices Donald Hayes (a fourth-rounder from Wisconsin) and Jim Turner (a seventh-rounder from Syracuse) and rookie free agent Thabiti Davis from Wake Forest.

Battling for time as Walls' backup are Luther Broughton, signed off the Eagles' practice squad late last season, and Kris Mangum, a 1997 seventh-round pick.

LINE—After coming under criticism last season for failing to control the line of scrimmage against the better teams, the unit has been shuffled. But the club decided against a major overhaul, instead making certain starting left guard Matt Campbell and starting center Frank Garcia were re-signed to long-term contracts. Blake Brockermeyer, the starter at left tackle, was rumored to be on the trading block but is back after playing well last season.

Changes are planned on the right side. Former Bill Corbin Lacina was signed as a free agent and will start at right guard in place of Greg Skrepenak, who who was waived in June. Lacina was signed with the new offense in mind; more athletic than Skrepenak, he is better suited to execute the pulling and blocking on the move required from the new scheme.

DEFENSE

LINE—Gilbert grabbed most of the offseason headlines and cash, but he wasn't the only beef brought in to shore up an area that has gone from a weakness to strength.

Gilbert, who sat out last season in a contract dispute with the Redskins, will start at right end. Jason Peter, a first-round pick from Nebraska, will compete for the starting position opposite Gilbert in the 3-4 scheme. Those two should make the line—which was aging and thin a year ago—stronger, bigger and more athletic. That should help improve the team's dismal No. 22 ranking against the run. Capers thought so much of Gilbert that he gave him a \$10 million signing bonus, a seven-year contract and surrendered two first-round picks to the Redskins as compensation.

Greg Kragen, the only starting nose tackle the team has had, retired at the end of last season. Les Miller, who played mostly end in the past, will compete with draft picks Chuck Wiley and Mitch Marrow, both chosen in the third round. And big Mike Fox, the former starter at left end, will play a role somewhere if he's finally over injuries to both shoulders that limited his availability and effectiveness last year.

Also in the mix is Shawn King, who has bulked up to 294 pounds and wants to prove he can be more than a third-down pass-rushing specialist. Seventh-round pick Viliami Maumau could add depth at nose tackle.

Carolina Panthers

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
7	Beuerlein, Steve	6-3/220	3-7-65	12	Notre Dame	FA/96	7/3
12	Collins, Kerry	6-5/240	12-30-72	4	Penn State	D1a/95	13/13
9	Matthews, Shane	6-3/196	6-1-70	5	Florida	FA/97	0/0

Running Backs

21	Biakabutuka, Tshimanga	6-0/210	1-24-74	2	Michigan	D1/96	8/2
38	Dulaney, Mike (FB)	6-0/245	9-9-70	4	North Carolina	FA/98	7/0*
40	Floyd, William (FB)	6-1/230	2-17-72	5	Florida State	UFA/98	15/15*
43	Greene, Scott (FB)	5-11/225	6-1-72	3	Michigan State	D6/96	16/14
23	Johnson, Anthony	6-0/225	10-25-67	9	Notre Dame	W-Chi/95	16/7
32	Lane, Fred	5-10/205	9-6-75	2	Lane (Tenn.)	FA/97	13/7
20	Oliver, Winslow	5-7/180	3-3-73	3	New Mexico	D3a/96	6/0

Receivers

82	Bates, Michael (KR)	5-10/189	12-19-69	6	Arizona	FA/96	16/0
49	Broughton, Luther (TE)	6-2/248	11-30-74	2	Furman	FA/97	0/0
83	Carrier, Mark	6-0/185	10-28-65	12	Nicholls State	ED/95(Cle)	9/6
86	Carruth, Rae	5-11/194	1-20-74	2	Colorado	D1/97	15/14
	Hayes, Donald	6-5/208	7-13-75	R	Wisconsin	D4/98	—
81	Ismail, Raghib	5-11/176	11-18-69	6	Notre Dame	T-Oak/96	13/2
48	Mangum, Kris (TE)	6-4/249	8-15-73	1	Mississippi	D7/97	2/1
87	Muhammad, Muhsin	6-2/217	5-5-73	3	Michigan State	D2/96	13/5
80	Stone, Dwight	6-0/195	1-28-64	12	Middle Tennessee State	FA/95	16/0
	Turner, Jim	6-4/212	11-13-75	R	Syracuse	D7b/98	—
85	Walls, Wesley (TE)	6-5/250	2-26-66	10	Mississippi	FA/96	15/15

Offensive Linemen

78	Brockermeyer, Blake (T)	6-4/300	4-11-73	4	Texas	D1c/95	16/13
66	Campbell, Matthew (G)	6-4/270	7-14-72	4	South Carolina	FA/95	16/14
76	Davidds-Garrido, Norberto (T)	6-6/313	10-4-72	3	USC	D4a/96	15/15
65	Garcia, Frank (C)	6-1/295	1-28-72	4	Washington	D4/95	16/16
60	Greely, Bucky (C)	6-2/285	7-30-72	3	Penn State	FA/96	6/0
61	Hannah, Shane (G)	6-5/320	10-21-71	2	Michigan State	FA/98	0/0*
64	Lacina, Corbin (G)	6-4/297	11-2-70	5	Augustana (S.D.)	FA/98	16/13*
63	Rodenhauser, Mark (C)	6-5/280	6-1-61	11	Illinois State	ED/95(Det)	16/0
70	Stewart, Todd (T)	6-6/290	9-30-74	1	California	FA/97	0/0
73	Wilson, Jamie (G)	6-7/288	6-6-79	2	Marshall	FA/97	0/0

Defensive Linemen

93	Fox, Mike (E)	6-8/295	8-5-67	9	West Virginia	FA/95	11/9
94	Gilbert, Sean (E)	6-5/318	4-10-70	6	Pittsburgh	FA/98	0/0*
96	King, Shawn (E)	6-3/294	6-24-72	4	Northeast Louisiana	D2/95	9/2
	Marrow, Mitch (T)	6-4/280	7-16-75	R	Pennsylvania	D3b/98	—
	Maumau, Viliami (T)	6-2/302	4-3-75	R	Colorado	D7a/98	—
69	Miller, Les (T)	6-7/305	3-1-65	12	Fort Hays State (Kan.)	FA/96	16/11
93	Morabito, Tim (T)	6-3/296	10-12-73	3	Boston College	W-Cin/97	8/0
	Peter, Jason (E)	6-5/288	9-13-74	R	Nebraska	D1/98	—
96	Sasa, Don (E)	6-3/303	9-16-72	3	Washington State	FA/97	1/0
71	Wiley, Chuck (T)	6-4/275	7-16-75	R	LSU	D3a/98	—

Linebackers

54	Bailey, Carlton	6-3/242	12-15-64	11	North Carolina	FA/97	8/0
56	Barrow, Micheal	6-2/236	4-19-70	6	Miami (Fla.)	FA/97	16/16
52	Brady, Jeff	6-1/243	11-9-68	8	Kentucky	FA/98	15/14*
56	Dixon, Ernest	6-1/240	10-17-71	5	South Carolina	FA/98	15/0*
54	Gaskins, Percell	6-0/230	4-25-72	3	Kansas State	W-SIU/97	12/0
91	Greene, Kevin	6-3/247	7-31-62	14	Auburn	FA/98	14/4*
	Jensen, Jerry	6-0/237	2-26-75	R	Washington	D5/98	—
57	Lathon, Lamar	6-3/260	12-23-67	9	Houston	FA/95	15/15
94	Saleh, Tarek	6-1/240	11-7-74	2	Wisconsin	D4/97	3/0
50	Tatum, Kinnon	6-0/222	7-19-75	2	Notre Dame	D3/97	16/0

Defensive Backs

24	Abraham, Clifton (CB)	5-9/185	12-9-71	3	Florida State	W-Chi/97	1/0
46	Alexander, Brent (S)	5-11/186	7-10-70	5	Tennessee State	FA/98	16/15*
41	Cook, Tol (CB)	5-11/188	12-9-64	12	Stanford	FA/96	16/0
25	Davis, Eric (CB)	5-11/185	1-26-68	9	Jacksonville State	FA/96	14/14
33	Evans, Doug (CB)	6-1/190	5-13-70	6	Louisiana Tech	UFA/98	15/15*
44	Gray, Derwin (S)	5-11/210	4-9-71	6	Brigham Young	FA/98	11/0*
30	Minter, Mike (S)	5-10/188	1-15-74	2	Nebraska	D2/97	16/11
27	Pieri, Damon (S)	6-0/186	9-25-70	4	San Diego State	FA/96	16/0
38	Poole, Tyrone (CB)	5-8/188	2-3-72	4	Fort Valley (Ga.) State	D1b/95	16/16
	Richardson, Damien (S)	6-1/210	4-3-76	R	Arizona State	D6/98	—
31	Smith, Rod (CB)	5-11/187	3-12-70	7	Notre Dame	FA/96	16/2
37	Wheeler, Leonard (CB)	5-11/189	1-15-69	7	Troy State	FA/98	15/0*

Specialists

4	Kasay, John (K)	5-10/198	10-27-69	8	Georgia	FA/95	16/0
13	Walter, Ken (P)	6-1/195	8-15-72	2	Kent	FA/96	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Rob Bohlinger, OT; Lonny Calicchio, P; Derrick Clark, LB; Dameyune Craig, QB; Bernard Dafney, G/T; Thabiti Davis, WR; Brian Edmonds, FB; Ray Jackson, S; Paul Janus, G; Eddie Mason, LB; Spencer Reid, LB; Marquette Smith, RB; Ryan Smith, DE; Seth Thomas, TE; Brian Wiggins, WR; Sean Williams, CB.

*—Not with Panthers in 1997.

Carolina OFFENSE

Lane Biakabutuka
RB

Floyd S. Greene
FB

K: Kasay
P: Walter
KR: Bates, Stone
PR: Poole, Oliver

Carruth Ismail
WR

Brockermeyer Wilson
LT

Campbell Greeley
LG

(QB) Collins Beuerlein
(C) Garcia Greeley
QB

Lacina Greeley
RG

Daivids-Garrido Stewart
RT

Walls Broughton
TE

Muhammad Carrier
WR

Evans Poole
CB

Gilbert Fox
RE

Barrow Tatum
RILB

Miller Wiley
NT

Peter King
LE

Davis Wheeler
CB

Probable starters listed on top

Lathon Dixon
OLB

Alexander Pieri
FS

Brady Jensen
LILB

K. Greene Saleh
OLB

Minter Richardson
SS

Carolina DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INTERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Brent Alexander, S (FA/Cardinals); Jeff Brady, ILB (FA/Vikings); Ernest Dixon, LB (FA/Saints); Doug Evans, CB (FA/Packers); William Floyd, FB (FA/49ers); Sean Gilbert, DE (FA/Redskins); Derwin Gray, S (FA/Colts); Kevin Greene, OLB (FA/49ers); Corbin Lacina, G (FA/Bills); Leonard Wheeler, CB (FA/Bengals).

Key losses: Chad Cota, SS (FA/Saints); Matt Elliott, G (FA/Falcons); Greg Kragen, NT (retired); Ernie Mills, WR (released/Cowboys); Sam Mills, ILB (retired); Andre Royal, ILB (FA/Saints); Ray Seals, DE (released); Pat Terrell, S (FA/Packers); Renaldo Turnbull, OLB (released).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Jason Peter	DT	Nebraska
3rd	Chuck Wiley	DT	LSU
3rd	Mitch Marrow	DT	Pennsylvania
4th	Donald Hayes	WR	Wisconsin
5th	Jerry Jensen	LB	Washington
6th	Damien Richardson	S	Arizona State
7th	Villami Maumau	DT	Colorado
7th	Jim Turner	WR	Syracuse

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	None	
1994	None	
1995	QB Kerry Collins	Starter with Panthers
	CB Tyrone Poole	Reserve with Panthers
	G Blake Brockermeyer	Starter with Panthers
1996	RB Tim Biakabutuka	Reserve with Panthers
1997	WR Rae Carruth	Starter with Panthers

Coaching Staff

Coach: Dom Capers. **Offensive staff:** Don Breaux (tight

ends) • Chuck Harris (running backs) • Jim McNally (offensive line) • Gil Haskell (offensive coordinator) • John Shoop (quarterbacks) • Richard Williamson (wide receivers).

Defensive staff: Billy Davis (outside linebackers) • Vic Fangio (defensive coordinator) • Ted Gill (defensive line) • Chick Harris (running backs) • Brett Maxie (assistant defensive backs) • Steve Shafer (defensive backs) • Kevin Steele (linebackers). **Others:** Chip Morton (strength and conditioning) • Brad Seely (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 7-9 (T2nd in NFC West); 4-4 in division; 5-7 in conference; 2-6 at home; 5-3 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Capers' regular-season record: 26-22 in three seasons with Panthers.

Capers' postseason record: 1-1 in one appearance with Panthers.

Last time made playoffs: 1996

1997 team rankings	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*287.8	12	26
Rushing offense	*109.9	8	15
Passing offense	*177.8	12	26
Scoring offense	265	13	27
Total defense	*311.3	9	15
Rushing defense	*123.3	10	22
Passing defense	*187.9	7	9
Scoring defense	314	T7	T13
Takeaways	22	13	T26
Giveaways	39	12	26
Turnover differential	-17	13	27
Sacks	36	14	23
Sacks allowed	44	T9	T18

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

No quarterback last season slipped as badly as Kerry Collins, whose rating declined nearly 24 points from the 1996 season:

Quarterback, team	'97 rating	'96 rating	Diff.
Kerry Collins, Carolina	55.7	79.4	-23.7
Steve McNair, Tennessee	70.4	90.6	-20.2
Vinny Testaverde, Baltimore	75.9	88.7	-12.8
Kent Graham, Arizona	65.9	75.1	-9.2
Dan Marino, Miami	80.7	87.8	-7.1
Ty Detmer, Philadelphia	73.9	80.8	-6.9
Stan Humphries, San Diego	70.8	76.7	-5.9
Gus Frerotte, Washington	73.8	79.3	-5.5
Jeff Blake, Cincinnati	77.6	80.3	-2.7

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	ATLANTA	1:01
Sept. 13	at New Orleans	12:01
Sept. 20	Open date	
Sept. 27	GREEN BAY	1:01
Oct. 4	at Atlanta	1:01
Oct. 11	at Dallas	12:01
Oct. 18	at Tampa Bay	1:01
Oct. 25	BUFFALO	8:20
Nov. 1	NEW ORLEANS	1:01
Nov. 8	at San Francisco	1:05
Nov. 15	MIAMI	1:01
Nov. 22	at St. Louis	3:05
Nov. 29	at N.Y. Jets	1:01
Dec. 6	SAN FRANCISCO	1:01
Dec. 13	WASHINGTON	1:01
Dec. 20	ST. LOUIS	1:01
Dec. 27	at Indianapolis	1:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T15TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	WASHINGTON	L	10-24
Sept. 7	at Atlanta	W	9-6
Sept. 14	at San Diego	W	26-7
Sept. 21	KANSAS CITY	L	14-35
Sept. 29	SAN FRANCISCO	L	21-34
Oct. 5	Open date		
Oct. 12	at Minnesota	L	14-21
Oct. 19	at New Orleans	W	13-0
Oct. 26	ATLANTA	W	21-12
Nov. 2	OAKLAND	W	38-14
Nov. 9	at Denver	L	0-34
Nov. 16	at San Francisco	L	19-27
Nov. 23	at St. Louis	W	16-10
Nov. 30	NEW ORLEANS	L	13-16
Dec. 8	at Dallas	W	23-13
Dec. 14	GREEN BAY	L	10-31
Dec. 20	ST. LOUIS	L	18-30

Miscellaneous

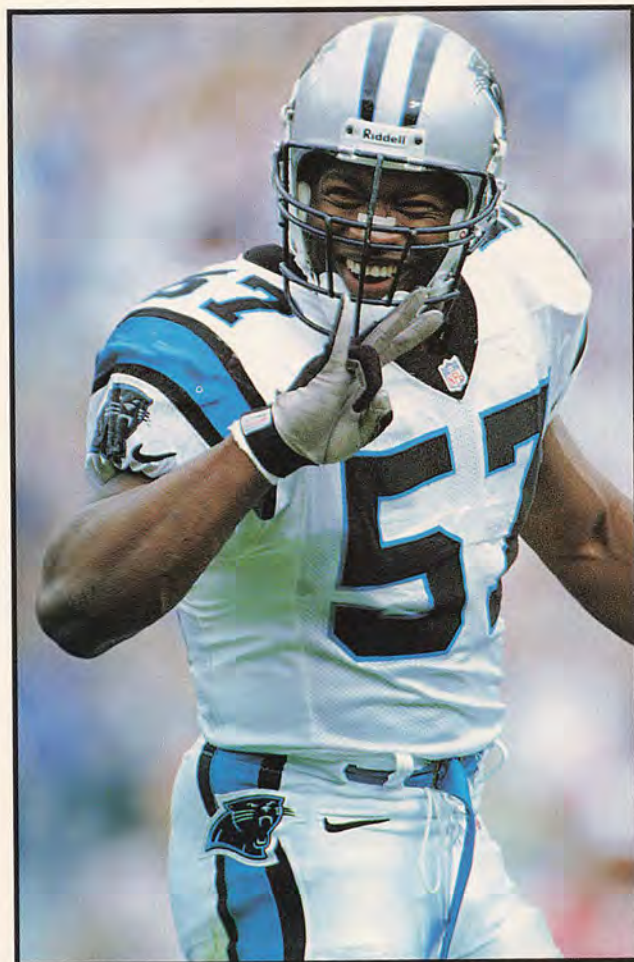
Owner: Jerry Richardson.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Ericsson (73,248, grass).

Ticket information: 704-358-7800.

Flagship radio station: WBT-AM, 1110.

Training site: Wofford College, Spartanburg, S.C.; 704-358-7000.



Lathon had a huge drop in production last season. But the return of Kevin Greene on the other side should mean a return to form.

LINEBACKERS—The defense never really recovered from the loss of Greene, who left the team because of a contract dispute after leading the league in sacks in 1996. Greene's departure forced Capers to move Micheal Barrow, a natural inside linebacker in the 3-4, out of position to compensate for Greene's absence on the outside. Now, Greene is back and Barrow can return to the inside, where he fits best.

Greene is 36 and no one knows how much is left in his tank, but he should ignite a fire under Lamar Lathon, his partner at outside linebacker. Lathon had a career-high 13½ sacks two years ago but only two last season without Greene on the other side to draw attention. Lathon also battled through a number of nagging injuries last season and thinks he will benefit from offseason knee surgery.

Barrow will be needed inside because last year's starters, Sam Mills and Andre Royal, are gone. Mills retired and Royal signed with the Saints as a free agent. Jeff Brady, a tackling machine for the Vikings the past three seasons, was signed to take Mills' place as the defensive signal-caller. Ernest Dixon and Tarek Saleh will serve as backups on the outside, while second-year pro Kinnon Tatum and rookie Jerry Jensen will be reserves inside.

SECONDARY—The free-agent signing of Evans from the Packers was a surprise because it appeared the team already was set at cornerback with Eric Davis and Tyrone Poole as the starters. Evans will replace Poole, who remained with the team after potential trades with the Ravens and Colts didn't materialize. Capers insists he is excited about using Poole as his third cornerback. The team added further cornerback depth by signing free agent Leonard Wheeler from the Bengals.

The safety situation isn't as certain because of the unexpected loss of starting strong safety Chad Cota to the Saints via free agency. But the secondary should be faster with Mike Minter, who started 11 games at

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	B+
Offensive backfield:	B-	Linebackers:	B-
Offensive line:	C-	Secondary:	B
Receivers:	C-	Special teams:	B

free safety as a rookie last season, moving over to replace Cota and Brent Alexander, signed as a free agent from the Cardinals, expected to step in at Minter's old spot.

One of Capers' goals in the offseason was to improve the defense's speed. Sixth-round pick Damien Richardson isn't particularly fast but is an intelligent player who loves to hit and should provide much-needed depth. Damon Pieri, a four-year veteran who has excelled on special teams, will fill much the same role. Derwin Gray, like Pieri a special teams demon, was signed as a free agent from the Colts and could see some time at safety.

SPECIAL TEAMS

One of the subtle but important offseason needs fulfilled was the re-signing of Michael Bates, one of the league's top kick returners and cover specialists. An unrestricted free agent, he signed a three-year contract worth \$4.05 million.

The punt-return duties will be left to Poole or Oliver, who shared the chores last year. Poole could lose the job permanently if he opens the season in a mental funk over losing his starting cornerback position, but the staff likes his big-play potential better than Oliver's. Then again, Oliver is a solid returner who doesn't bobble the catch nearly as often as Poole.

John Kasay returns as the kicker and hopes an improved offense creates more field-goal opportunities. Last year, the offense's frequent turnovers were mostly to blame for his dramatic drop in attempts from the previous year. He made 37-of-45 attempts in 1996 but only 22-of-26 last season.

Punter Ken Walter did a decent enough job as a rookie last season, averaging 42.4 yards, but he needs to be more consistent. He did display a knack for downing the ball inside the opponents' 20, turning the trick 29 times last season.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The problem with trying to recreate the magic of 1996 is that the Panthers played a soft schedule that season and were able to surprise opponents. Those days are history.

A quick start is imperative. After opening with NFC West rivals Atlanta (home) and New Orleans (road), the Panthers thankfully get an open date before playing host to Green Bay. That game could prove critical. Given an extra week to prepare, Carolina might have a chance to pull an upset and put itself in good position before a subsequent three-week stretch that includes road games at Atlanta, Dallas and Tampa Bay.

The Panthers won't play NFC West rival San Francisco until the ninth game of the season; then they'll face the 49ers twice in less than a month. That includes a December 6 rematch at Ericsson Stadium, where the Panthers will play three of their last four games. A season-ending trip to Indianapolis could have playoff implications and be emotion-charged with Polian going against his former employer.

BOTTOM LINE

The Panthers should be applauded for refusing to stand pat after the disappointment of last season. And they certainly should be much improved at Ericsson Stadium, where in 1997 they lost six of eight games after going 9-0 in 1996. But the erratic Collins remains the quarterback. Even if he improves dramatically and the team performs at a much higher level than last year, it still could struggle to finish .500 playing this schedule.

TSN

Joe Menzer covers the Panthers for the Winston-Salem (N.C.) Journal.



Ditka says Saints will be tougher — alas, they probably won't be better

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 3rd

BY MIKE STROM

The Saints won six games in Mike Ditka's first season as coach, double their victory total from the year before. In many circles, that would be cause for celebration. Not for Ditka.

Ditka, 58, one of only two men to be part of a Super Bowl champion as a player, assistant and coach, is operating under a self-imposed three-year mandate to turn this franchise into a winner. Last year's 6-10 season, in which the Saints ranked an impressive fourth in team defense and an abominable 30th in offense, convinced Ditka that he must tighten the screws to meet his deadline. No more Mr. Nice Guy.

"What we need is toughness," said Ditka, the consummate NFL tough guy in 33 years as a player and coach. "I don't think we were tough enough. I don't care how well people tell you our defense played, we were not tough enough. We were not tough enough on offense, and we were not smart enough."

Actually, the defense benefited statistically from the offense's ineptitude. Numerous opponents played conservatively after taking a lead, running the ball, passing infrequently, realizing that the New Orleans offense posed little threat. Consequently, the Saints' defense often wasn't challenged for a full four quarters.

So improving the talent level on offense—where Ditka hopes to instill a smash-mouth mentality, starting with new quarterback Billy Joe Hobert—was the top offseason priority. Lamar Smith was signed from the Seahawks to fill the role of feature running back. Sean Dawkins and Qadry Ismail were brought in to bolster the receiving corps. In the draft, Ditka used the team's first two picks to upgrade the line, taking tackle Kyle Turley from San Diego State and tight end Cameron Cleeland from Washington. Both are expected to be starters by the September 6 season opener.

Defensively, the Saints have a huge hole at middle linebacker, where Winfred Tubbs departed via free agency for the 49ers. But Tyrone Drakeford was signed from the 49ers to replace Eric Allen and supply a more physical, aggressive style at right cornerback. Strong safety Chad Cota and linebacker Andre Royal were signed from the Panthers to serve as additional headhunters. In all, there will be at least 10 new starters among the first 22 and possibly as many as 13.

"We are going to get tougher physically," Ditka said. "You've got to win this game by being able to out-physical people as well as out-think them. And that's what we have to do."

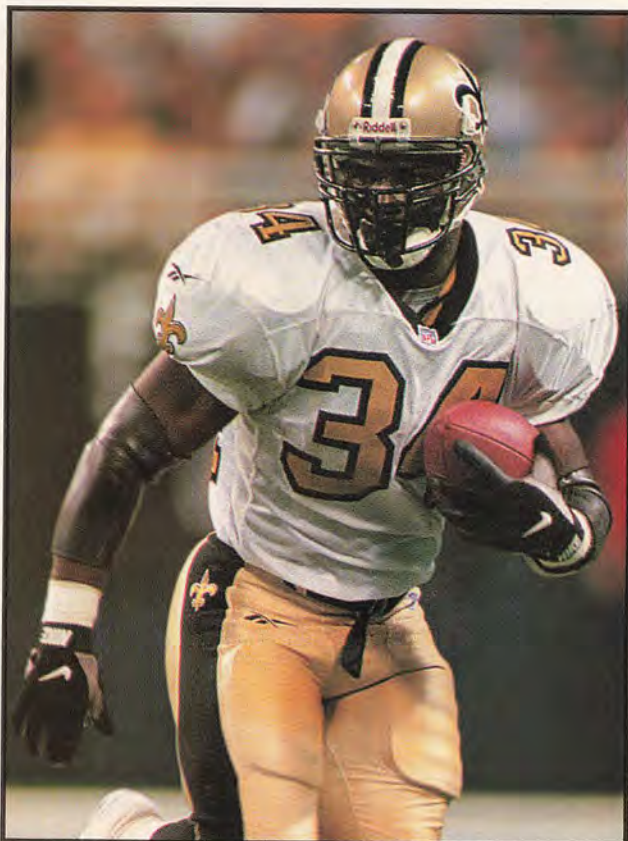
COACHING

Ditka has wasted no time in reshaping this team in his image. After his first 16 months on the job, just 23 players remain from the '96 team coached by Jim Mora and interim replacement Rick Venturi. And Ditka still must select his final 53-man roster for this season, which means more holdovers could be jettisoned.

Ditka's fiery personality has been well-received by his players, although it did cause a rift with Allen and led to his trade to the Raiders. Ditka's reputation as a quarterback-killer remains intact after a 1997 season in which four players started at the position.

Hiring Zaven Yarialian as defensive coordinator proved to be a solid move. Yarialian's attack-oriented 4-3 scheme helped cover for some of the personnel deficiencies.

The jury is out on offensive coordinator Danny Abramowicz, whose charges were equally dismal running or throwing the ball (the Saints finished 27th in the NFL in both). But no legitimate judgment can be rendered until the talent level improves significantly. It was not Abramowicz's fault the Saints committed a club-record 55 turnovers, including 33 interceptions.



Zellers finished last season as the Saints' feature back, but the arrival of Lamar Smith likely means Zellers will be blocking this year.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Hobert will enter camp as a starter for the first time in his six-year NFL career. If someone such as Vinny Testaverde or Neil O'Donnell becomes available, Ditka and general manager Bill Kuharich then would have a decision to make. Do they risk upsetting the team's chemistry by bringing in an outsider or gamble on Hobert being the answer?

The practical decision would be to upgrade the position, currently the team's most critical area of concern. But Ditka sometimes makes decisions with his heart. He has been impressed by Hobert's leadership qualities and the way teammates rallied around him. Hobert was 0-5 as a NFL starter before directing the Saints to a 2-2 mark at season's end.

Hobert passed for six touchdowns and was intercepted eight times, modest numbers except when compared to those of Heath Shuler and Danny Wuerffel, the other two incumbent quarterbacks; they were intercepted 22 times and passed for six touchdowns last season. Shuler was intercepted 14 times before ending the season on injured reserve. He is attempting to recover from a possible career-ending injury to his left foot; a tackle by Chester McGlockton last season crushed the small bones in the ball of his left foot.

RUNNING BACKS—Smith, a backup to former Pro Bowl running back Chris Warren in his first four seasons in Seattle, now has relatively clear sailing to realizing his dream of becoming an NFL feature back. Ditka decided he didn't want Mario Bates, so the former No. 2 draft pick was allowed to join the Cardinals via free agency. That

leaves Ray Zellers as Smith's chief competition.

Both are expected to start and both like to gain their yardage between the tackles, but it's unlikely team officials had blocking in mind when they signed Smith to a four-year, \$7.1 million contract. Smith can add an extra \$3 million to the value of his contract by being the first Saint to rush for 1,000 yards since Dalton Hilliard in 1989. The eye-catching stat on Smith is his career 4.6-yard average per carry.

Zellers ended last season as the starting halfback, but his team-leading 552 rushing yards and 3.5-yard average per carry were far from awe inspiring. Zellers will be an unrestricted free agent after the season, so he has extra motivation. But as a former fullback at Notre Dame, Zellers' outstanding blocking ability may cement his role as Smith's lead blocker.

If Smith and Zellers prove not to be the answer, the Saints are in trouble. Depth is thin with Troy Davis and Aaron Craver the top reserves. One possible sleeper could be rookie Wilmont Perry, a fifth-round pick and last season's NCAA Division II offensive player of the year. He averaged a colossal 9.1 yards per carry while rushing for 1,770 yards as a senior at Livingstone College (N.C.), the same alma mater as All-Pro tight end Ben Coates.

RECEIVERS—It became apparent during the draft that Ditka was more concerned with upgrading his running game than his receiving corps when he opted for Cleeland in the second round rather than fleet Oregon receiver Pat Johnson. At 6-4 and 272, Cleeland is nearly big enough to serve as a third tackle, although team officials say he must refine his blocking. Cleeland is considered a legitimate receiving threat capable of stretching defenses down the middle, something Irv Smith and John Farquhar could not supply on a regular basis. Smith, a first-round pick in 1993, departed via free agency to the 49ers.

Dawkins and Andre Hastings are expected to start outside, but neither is a true deep threat. Hastings had a solid first season for the Saints last year; he has dependable hands but isn't a burner. Dawkins' size (6-4, 215) and experience (four years as a starter with the Colts) make him an early favorite to become Hobert's go-to guy. Signing Dawkins away from the Colts in late April made Randal Hill expendable, so he wasn't re-signed despite leading the team with 55 receptions in his one year as a Saint. Hill's speed will be missed, but Ismail, Keith Poole and Alvin Harper have the potential to fill his slot.

Poole caught two touchdown passes in the season finale after spending most of the season on the inactive roster. Harper was claimed off waivers from the Redskins near the end of last season but did not play because of a knee injury. He was a deep threat in Dallas but has been a disappointment since leaving the Cowboys in 1995. Ismail was a disappointment last season, catching no passes for the receiver-starved Dolphins.

One possible boost could come from Eric Guliford if he is able to recover from a torn Achilles' tendon injured in an offseason pickup basketball game. Guliford finished last season as the No. 3 receiver.

LINE—After spending three high No. 1 picks on linemen in the past six years, the Saints are overdue for a return on their investment. Besides allowing the seventh-highest number of sacks in the league last year, the Saints averaged just 91.3 rushing yards per game.

That should change if Turley (No. 7 overall this year), All-Pro left tackle Willie Roaf (No. 8, 1993) and right guard Chris Naeole (No. 10, 1997) have

New Orleans Saints

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
12	Hobert, Billy Joe	6-3/230	1-8-71	6	Washington	T-Oak/97	7/4
5	Shuler, Heath	6-2/216	12-31-71	5	Tennessee	T-Was/97	10/9
7	Wuerffel, Danny	6-1/212	5-27-74	2	Florida	D4a/97	7/2

Running Backs

40	Bender, Wes (FB)	5-10/249	8-2-70	3	USC	FA/97	11/0
21	Brown, Derek	5-9/205	4-15-71	6	Nebraska	D4b/93	0/0
32	Craver, Aaron	6-0/220	12-18-68	8	Fresno State	FA/98	15/5*
28	Davis, Troy	5-7/191	9-14-75	2	Iowa State	D3/97	16/7
44	McCrary, Fred (FB)	6-0/232	9-19-72	3	Mississippi State	FA/97	7/0
33	Perry, Wilmont	6-1/230	2-24-75	R	Livingstone (N.C.)	D5/98	—
25	Smith, Lamar	5-11/218	11-29-70	5	Houston	FA/98	12/2*
34	Zellers, Ray (FB)	5-11/233	3-25-73	4	Notre Dame	D2/95	16/16

Receivers

89	Bech, Brett	6-1/184	8-20-71	2	LSU	FA/96	10/0
48	Cleeland, Cam (TE)	6-4/272	4-15-75	R	Washington	D2/98	—
86	Dawkins, Sean	6-4/215	2-3-71	5	California	UFA/98	14/12*
87	Farquhar, John (TE)	6-6/278	3-22-72	3	Duke	FA/96	12/8
46	Gammon, Kendall (TE)	6-4/288	10-23-68	7	Pittsburg (Kan.) State	FA/96	16/0
84	Guliford, Eric	5-8/165	10-25-69	5	Arizona State	FA/97	16/2
80	Harper, Alvin	6-4/218	7-6-68	8	Tennessee	FA/95	12/0
88	Hastings, Andre	6-1/190	11-7-70	6	Georgia	D3/93	16/16
49	Hinton, Marcus (TE)	6-4/265	12-27-71	2	Alcorn State	FA/96	0/0
82	Ismail, Qadry	6-0/196	11-8-70	6	Syracuse	FA/98	3/0*
18	McCullough, Andy	6-3/210	11-11-75	R	Tennessee	D7a/98	—
83	Poole, Keith	6-0/188	6-18-74	2	Arizona State	D4b/97	3/0
85	Savoie, Nicky (TE)	6-5/253	9-21-73	2	LSU	D6/97	1/0
81	Twyner, Gunnard	5-10/165	7-14-73	2	Western Illinois	FA/97	2/0

Offensive Linemen

69	Ackerman, Tom (C)	6-3/290	9-6-72	3	Eastern Washington	D5b/96	14/0
76	Davis, Isaac (G)	6-3/320	4-8-72	5	Arkansas	W-SD/97	15/14
62	Fontenot, Jerry (C)	6-3/300	11-21-66	10	Texas A&M	UFA/97	16/16
76	Hills, Keno (G)	6-6/305	6-13-73	3	SW Louisiana	D6a/96	9/6
72	Jenkins, Trezelle (T)	6-7/317	3-13-73	4	Michigan	FA/97	2/1
74	Jones, Clarence (T)	6-6/280	5-6-68	8	Maryland	FA/96	15/15
67	McCollum, Andy (C)	6-4/295	6-2-70	5	Toledo	FA/94	16/16
65	Naeole, Chris (G)	6-3/313	12-25-74	2	Colorado	D1/97	4/0
77	Roaf, Willie (T)	6-5/300	4-18-70	6	Louisiana Tech	D1/93	16/16
71	Siglar, Ricky (T)	6-7/308	6-14-66	7	San Jose State	FA/97	16/1
68	Turley, Kyle (T)	6-5/307	9-24-75	R	San Diego State	D1/98	—
66	Verstegen, Mike (G)	6-6/311	10-24-71	4	Wisconsin	D3/95	14/8

Defensive Linemen

97	Glover, La'Roi (T)	6-1/285	7-4-74	3	San Diego State	W-Oak/97	15/2
94	Johnson, Joe (E/T)	6-4/270	7-11-72	5	Louisville	D1/94	16/16
86	Johnson, Tony (E)	6-5/255	2-5-72	3	Alabama	FA/96	7/1
73	Martin, Wayne (T)	6-5/275	10-26-65	10	Arkansas	D1/89	16/16
75	Pittman, Julian (T)	6-4/286	4-22-75	R	Florida State	D4b/98	—
95	Robbins, Austin (T)	6-6/290	3-1-71	5	North Carolina	T-Oak/96	12/0
99	Sagapolutele, Pio (T)	6-6/297	11-28-69	8	San Diego State	FA/97	15/13
91	Smith, Brady (E)	6-5/260	6-5-73	3	Colorado State	D3/96	16/2
90	Tomich, Jared (E)	6-2/258	4-24-74	2	Nebraska	D2b/97	16/1

Linebackers

54	Aleaga, Ink	6-1/225	4-27-73	2	Washington	FA/97	3/1
92	Bordano, Chris	6-1/241	12-30-74	R	SMU	D6/98	—
53	Davis, Don	6-1/240	12-17-72	3	Kansas	FA/96	11/0
55	Fields, Mark	6-2/244	11-9-72	4	Washington State	D1/95	16/15
52	Harvey, Richard	6-1/242	9-11-66	9	Tulane	FA/95	14/13
58	Jones, Brian	6-1/250	1-22-68	5	Texas	FA/95	0/0
59	Mitchell, Keith	6-2/240	7-24-74	2	Texas A&M	FA/97	16/2
55	Mitchell, Kevin	6-1/250	1-1-71	5	Syracuse	UFA/98	16/0*
51	Royal, Andre	6-2/238	12-1-72	4	Alabama	RFA/98	16/13*
42	Warner, Ron	6-2/247	9-26-75	R	Kansas	D7b/98	—

Defensive Backs

30	Cherry, Je'Rod (S)	6-1/210	5-30-73	3	California	D2/96	16/0
37	Cota, Chad (S)	6-1/198	8-13-71	4	Oregon	RFA/98	16/16*
22	Drakeford, Tyrone (CB)	5-9/185	6-21-71	5	Virginia Tech	UFA/98	16/2*
38	Greer, Donovan (CB)	5-9/178	9-11-74	2	Texas A&M	FA/97	7/1
23	Hewitt, Chris (S)	6-0/210	7-22-74	2	Cincinnati	FA/97	11/2
24	Kelly, Rob (S)	6-0/199	6-21-74	2	Ohio State	D2a/97	16/2
29	Knight, Sammy (S)	6-0/205	9-10-75	2	USC	FA/97	16/12
25	Molden, Alex (CB)	5-10/190	8-4-73	3	Oregon	D1/96	16/15
41	Strong, William (CB)	5-10/191	11-3-71	3	North Carolina State	D5/95	0/0
26	Washington, Mickey (CB)	5-9/195	7-8-68	9	Texas A&M	FA/97	16/2
42	Weary, Fred (CB)	5-10/177	4-12-74	R	Florida	D4a/98	—

Specialists

10	Brien, Doug (K)	6-0/180	11-24-70	5	California	FA/95	16/0
3	Royals, Mark (P)	6-5/215	6-22-64	9	Appalachian State	FA/97	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Anthony Cobbs, S; Jeff Danish, DT; Jake Delhomme, QB; Luke Fickell, DT; Ron Leshinski, TE; Marc Lillibridge, LB; Earl Little, S; Troy Riddle, DT; Milt Stegall, WR; Darryl Terrell, OT; Larry Townsend, DT; Robert Young, DE.
*—Not with Saints in 1997.



New Orleans OFFENSE

L. Smith
T. Davis



(QB) Hobert Shuler
(C) McCollum Fontenot



Zellers
Craver

Dawkins
Poole



Roaf
Siglar



I. Davis
Hills



Naeole
Verstegen



Turley
C. Jones



Cleeland
Farquhar



Hastings
Harper



Drakeford
Weary



J. Johnson
B. Smith



Glover
Robbins



Martin
Sagapolutele



B. Smith
Tomich



Molden
Washington

Probable starters
listed on top

Fields
Kei. Mitchell



Kelly
Knight



B. Jones
Kev. Mitchell



Cota
Hewitt



Royal
Harvey

New Orleans DEFENSE

K: Brien
P: Royals
KR: T. Davis, Small
PR: Hastings, Weary

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Chad Cota, SS (FA/Panthers); Aaron Craver, RB (FA/Chargers); Sean Dawkins, WR (FA/Colts); Tyrone Drakeford, CB (FA/49ers); Qadry Ismail, WR (FA/Dolphins); Kevin Mitchell, LB (FA/49ers); Andre Royal, LB (FA/Panthers); Lamar Smith, RB (FA/Seahawks).

Key losses: Eric Allen, CB (trade/Raiders); Mario Bates, RB (FA/Cardinals); Randal Hill, WR (FA); Darren Mickell, DE (retired); Doug Nussmeier, QB (FA/Broncos); Irv Smith, TE (FA/49ers); Winfred Tubbs, MLB (FA/49ers).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Kyle Turley	T	San Diego State
2nd	Cameron Cleeland	TE	Washington
4th	Fred Weary	CB	Florida
4th	Julian Pittman	DE	Florida State
5th	Wilmont Perry	RB	Livingstone (N.C.)
6th	Chris Bordano	LB	SMU
7th	Andy McCullough	WR	Tennessee
7th	Ron Warner	LB	Kansas

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	T William Roaf	Starter with Saints
	TE Irv Smith	Reserve with 49ers
1994	DE Joe Johnson	Starter with Saints
1995	LB Mark Fields	Starter with Saints
1996	CB Alex Molden	Starter with Saints
1997	G Chris Naeole	Starter with Saints

Coaching Staff

Coach: Mike Ditka. **Offensive staff:** Danny Abramowicz (offensive coordinator) • Tom Clements (quarterbacks) • Judd Garrett (offensive assistant) • Harold Jackson (wide receivers) • Lary Kuharich (running backs) • Dan Neal (tight

ends/offensive line assistant) • Dick Stanfel (offensive line). **Defensive staff:** Walt Corey (defensive line) • Jack Del Rio (linebackers) • Ned James (defensive assistant) • Rick Venturi (assistant head coach/secondary) • Zaven Yarialian (defensive coordinator). **Others:** Bobby April (special teams) • Markus Paul (assistant strength and conditioning) • Mike Woicik (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 6-10 (4th in NFC West); 1-7 in division; 4-8 in conference; 3-5 at home; 3-5 on road.

1997 postseason record: None.

Ditka's regular-season record: 6-10 in one season with Saints; 112-72 overall in 12 seasons with Saints and Bears. **Ditka's postseason record:** 6-6 in seven appearances with Bears (1-0 in Super Bowl).

Team record past five years: 31-49 (.388, ranks 22nd in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1992.

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*252.8	15	30
Rushing offense	*91.3	14	27
Passing offense	*161.5	13	27
Scoring offense	237	15	30
Total defense	*290.3	4	4
Rushing defense	*110.3	6	14
Passing defense	*180.1	4	6
Scoring defense	327	9	T16
Takeaways	31	5	T8
Giveaways	55	15	30
Turnover differential	-24	15	30
Sacks	59	1	1
Sacks allowed	50	12	24

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

How bad was the Saints' offense last year? They had 20 fewer first downs than the next-worst team. The bottom 10:

Team	First downs
New Orleans	229
Tampa Bay	249
San Diego	251
Oakland	263
New England	267
Buffalo	268
St. Louis	271
N.Y. Giants	273
Dallas	279
Atlanta	281

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	at St. Louis	12:01
Sept. 13	CAROLINA	12:01
Sept. 20	Open date	
Sept. 27	at Indianapolis	12:01
Oct. 4	NEW ENGLAND	12:01
Oct. 11	SAN FRANCISCO	12:01
Oct. 18	at Atlanta	1:01
Oct. 25	TAMPA BAY	12:01
Nov. 1	at Carolina	1:01
Nov. 8	at Minnesota	12:01
Nov. 15	ST. LOUIS	12:01
Nov. 22	at San Francisco	5:20
Nov. 29	at Miami	1:01
Dec. 6	DALLAS	12:01
Dec. 13	ATLANTA	12:01
Dec. 20	at Arizona	2:15
Dec. 27	BUFFALO	12:01

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T25TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at St. Louis	L	24-38
Sept. 7	SAN DIEGO	L	6-20
Sept. 14	at San Francisco	L	7-33
Sept. 21	DETROIT	W	35-17
Sept. 28	at N.Y. Giants	L	9-14
Oct. 5	at Chicago	W	20-17
Oct. 12	ATLANTA	L	17-23
Oct. 19	CAROLINA	L	0-13
Oct. 26	SAN FRANCISCO	L	0-23
Nov. 2	Open date		
Nov. 9	at Oakland	W	13-10
Nov. 16	SEATTLE (OT)	W	20-17
Nov. 23	at Atlanta	L	3-20
Nov. 30	at Carolina	W	16-13
Dec. 7	ST. LOUIS	L	27-34
Dec. 14	ARIZONA	W	27-10
Dec. 21	at Kansas City	L	13-25

Miscellaneous

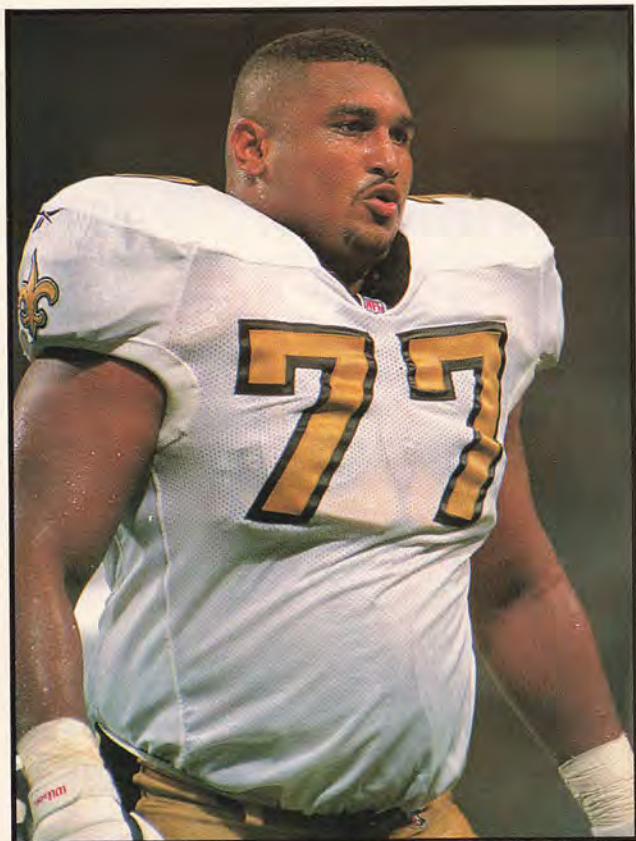
Owner: Tom Benson.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Louisiana Superdome (69,028, artificial).

Ticket information: 504-731-1700.

Flagship radio station: WWL-AM, 870.

Training site: University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, La Crosse, Wis.; 608-789-4550.



Roaf has the reputation of being one of the best tackles in the league, but the line didn't perform up to expectations last season.

their way. Turley is expected to replace Clarence Jones at right tackle and team with Naeole to give Ditka two tough, nasty and aggressive players lined up next to each other. Naeole is coming off a rookie season marred by ankle and knee injuries that limited him to four games.

Roaf could be the only starter to maintain his position if Isaac Davis prevails at left guard as expected and Andy McCollum bests Jerry Fontenot at center. McCollum, last year's starting left guard, is returning to what is considered his best position; he started 16 games at center in 1996.

DEFENSE

LINE—There will be two new starters in a front four that was considered the strength of the league's fourth-ranked defense. Left end Darren Mickell's sudden retirement at 27 has propelled Brady Smith into the lineup, and La'Roi Glover's impressive showing in the offseason conditioning program has pushed him ahead of Pio Sagapolutele at right tackle.

The stalwarts remain left tackle Wayne Martin and right end Joe Johnson, who combined for 19 sacks in '97. Martin (10½ sacks) is entering his 10th season and, like a fine wine, seems to get better with age. But he is recovering from arthroscopic surgery on both shoulders. Johnson is unhappy at being designated a franchise player and could be a holdout if not signed to a long-term deal.

Depth should not be a problem with Sagapolutele, Austin Robbins, Jared Tomich and fourth-round pick Julian Pittman offering an attractive blend of experience and youth.

LINEBACKERS—Brian Jones is the key to this unit continuing as a force. Jones replaces Tubbs, who posted a club-record 160 tackles before leaving for San Francisco, at middle linebacker. Jones, 30, is coming off reconstructive knee surgery for a torn anterior cruciate ligament. At the time of his injury in camp, Jones was grading out higher than Tubbs.

Yaralian and his staff are counting on weakside linebacker Mark Fields for big numbers. A No. 1 pick in 1995, Fields began flashing superstar potential last season under the tutelage of Venturi, who was

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B+	Defensive line:	B+
Offensive backfield:	C	Linebackers:	C+
Offensive line:	C	Secondary:	C
Receivers:	C	Special teams:	C-

retained by Ditka as linebackers coach. Fields, who had 108 tackles and eight sacks, likely will blitz even more in '98.

Royal, Carolina's third-leading tackler, was signed to replace Richard Harvey at strongside linebacker, freeing Harvey to be a backup at all three positions. Former 49ers reserve Kevin Mitchell, second-year man Keith Mitchell and rookie Chris Bordano are the top candidates for the remaining two roster spots. With Venturi moving to secondary coach, this unit's new leader is Jack Del Rio, a former Pro Bowl middle linebacker with the Vikings.

SECONDARY—For the blitz package to be successful, it's imperative to have two solid cover corners. Drakeford and left cornerback Alex Molden have the skill to supply that man coverage, but they still must prove themselves. Drakeford is most likely to fill the playmaker role. His five interceptions as a nickel back ranked second on the 49ers. Molden, a No. 1 pick in 1996, had no interceptions in his first season as a full-time starter.

Cota is expected to provide two invaluable ingredients at strong safety: leadership and run-stopping ability. His 153 stops paced Carolina last season. Sammy Knight and Rob Kelly, who finished 1997 as rookie starters, will compete for the job at free safety. Knight, whose five interceptions led the team, will have plenty of opportunity to add to that total since opponents figure to test this group up the middle. Mickey Washington and rookie Fred Weary should back up Drakeford and Molden.

SPECIAL TEAMS

It's still uncertain who will replace Guliford on kick returns if he can't play. Guliford could return by October if there are no complications with his injury, but his availability is a big concern for special teams coach Bobby April. Hastings and Weary could return punts, with Troy Davis and/or Ismail returning kicks, but none is as reliable or dangerous as Guliford, who ranked second in the NFC in kickoff returns and had a 102-yarder for a touchdown against the Rams.

Kicking and punting are in good hands with Doug Brien and Mark Royals, respectively. Royals led the NFL with a 45.9-yard average. Brien had three game-winning field goals and is one of the league's most accurate kickers. The Saints have nowhere to go but up in punt and kickoff coverage after ranking 30th and 15th, respectively, last season.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

For a team that has lost 15 of its past 16 games against NFC West foes, look no further than the first five games to find the key to the Saints' season. They open with division games against the Rams on the road and Panthers at home, then have a bye week before playing the Colts on the road. It is a schedule tailor-made for a 3-0 start, given those clubs' combined 15-33 record last season. A sweep would have Ditka and the Saints brimming with confidence as they then return home for games against the Patriots and 49ers.

The good news is that if the Saints somehow are in the playoff race in December, they play three of their final four games in the Superdome, against the Cowboys, Falcons and Bills. Overall, the Saints have the league's sixth-easiest schedule, their 16 opponents posting a 1997 winning percentage of .473. The Saints also play their first seven games in domes and 12 of their 16 overall. Last year, they were 3-7 in domes.

BOTTOM LINE

The Saints lost their most productive defensive player in Tubbs and still have far too many questions on offense, including at quarterback. That makes it difficult to get excited about their chances of returning to the playoffs for the first time since 1992. Improving on last year's 6-10 record would be a genuine accomplishment.

TSN

Mike Strom covers the Saints for the New Orleans Times-Picayune.



Three years later, it's time the move finally pays some on-field dividends

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 5th

BY JIM THOMAS

Is the honeymoon about to end for the Rams in St. Louis? Never have football fans paid so much and gotten so little in return. All 24 regular-season home games have sold out since the team moved from Los Angeles in 1995. But with each passing season, fans have gotten less return on their personal-seat-license-laden investment. There were seven victories in '95, six in '96 and five in '97.

There was more grumbling by fans in the offseason than at any time in the franchise's stay in St. Louis, particularly when the Rams swung and missed a couple of times early in free agency.

Coach Dick Vermeil feels their pain. But only to a point. As for last season's 5-11 record in his not-so-triumphant return to coaching, Vermeil said: "I'm not embarrassed, but I'm disappointed I wasn't able to do better."

But he also notes that much of his time has been spent trying to eradicate past mistakes. Such as the Rams not getting near their money's worth on high-priced free agents Dwayne White (guard), Leslie O'Neal (defensive end) and Robert Jones (middle linebacker). Or gambling—and losing—on running back Lawrence Phillips with the sixth pick of the 1996 draft. Or giving up too soon on running back Jerome Bettis, tight end Troy Drayton and defensive lineman Sean Gilbert.

Vermeil has stopped the bleeding. Whether it's enough to post the franchise's first winning season since 1989 remains to be seen. The fans may not be able to take another losing season. Vermeil, who turns 62 in October, may not, either.

COACHING

Before St. Louis, Vermeil's last sideline stint came in 1982 with the Eagles. The layoff showed at times. Vermeil concedes his in-game strategy and decision-making weren't as sharp as they needed to be, although he improved as a sideline coach as the season progressed.

Vermeil purposely kept himself out of the X's and O's because of the long layoff, but he plans to be more involved this season. That could mean more emphasis on the running game, two-back sets and play-action passes. In addition, the shotgun formation was added during minicamp.

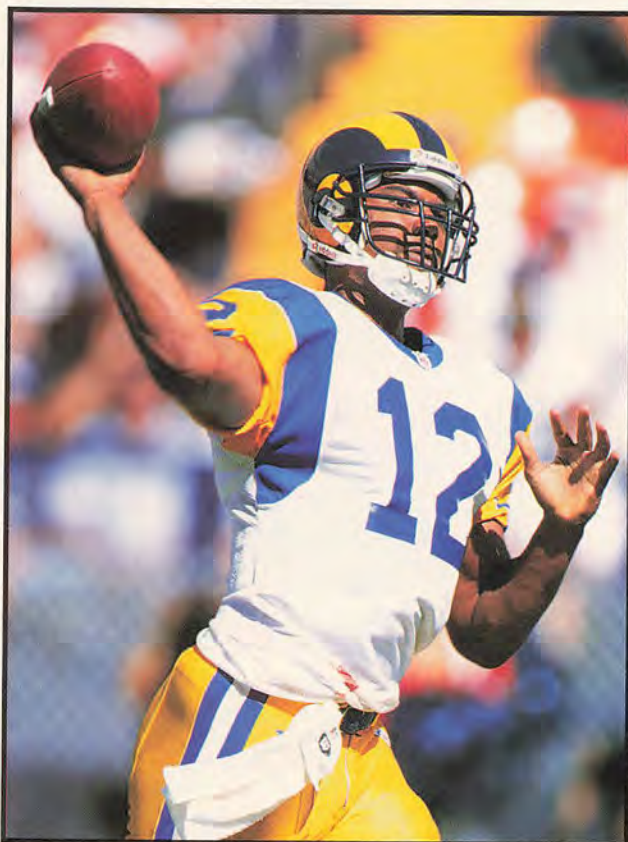
In Philadelphia, Vermeil had the reputation of being demanding but at the same time ultra-loyal to his players. He seems to have lost some of that edge; he was so effusive in praising most players last season, you would have thought the team was 11-5. Vermeil promises that will change. He has put players on notice that they will be accountable for their performance. He wants higher expectations and a greater sense of urgency.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—This could be a defining season in Tony Banks' NFL career. He's in the final year of a three-year contract. If he flops, he's gone. But if he builds on last year's strong finish, he will cash in with a new contract.

After an awful first half last season, Banks had an efficiency rating of 82 in the second half, which would have placed him among the top six quarterbacks in the NFC had he done it over a full season. Banks still fumbles too often—he tied for second in the league with 15 last season after leading the league with 21 the year before. But he has the arm strength, mobility and toughness to succeed. He quietly put in the off-season work necessary to go from prospect to bona fide quarterback. That wasn't the case a year ago.

Steve Bono and lefty Will Furrer will battle for the backup spot, with Kurt Warner, fresh off a stint in NFL Europe, hoping to open eyes in camp. In the battle for No. 2, Bono has the edge in experience.



ROBERT SCALF/TSN

Banks seemingly has the physical tools to be a solid quarterback. But his time may be running out; he needs to produce this season.

RUNNING BACKS—Vermeil didn't get the back he wanted in the draft, Penn State's Curtis Enis, but he did come away with workhorse Robert Holcombe of Illinois. Holcombe and his competition for the starting job—Jerald Moore—have similar running styles. Both run hard between the tackles, do little dancing and get yards after contact.

At 5-11 and 216, Holcombe is a couple of inches taller and about 15 pounds lighter than Moore. Holcombe is a tad faster. Neither is capable of Barry Sanders-like runs of 50 or 60 yards, but they should get clusters of 4- and 5-yard gains. Moore did a credible job in five late-season starts after Phillips' release, although there are concerns about his durability and ball security.

The Rams have one of the NFL's best receiving backs in Amp Lee, who has averaged 58 catches over the past four seasons. Last season, his first in St. Louis, he led the team in receptions (61) and receiving yards (825) and was even used as a slot receiver. Although he lacks straight-out speed, Lee is shifty enough to be effective on the draw play, too.

Another name to remember is David Thompson, who emerged as a kick-return threat as a rookie last season and could see his role expand.

At fullback, the Rams will go as far as Craig "Ironhead" Heyward's waistline takes them. Heyward was a disappointment last season after reporting to camp at 287 pounds. And similar to last season, there isn't an alternative, unless fifth-round pick Raymond Priester develops faster than anticipated.

RECEIVERS—Rest assured, hard-working Isaac Bruce will not miss almost five full games with a hamstring injury, as was the case in '97. He should return to his status as one of the game's elite receivers.

Free-agent pickup Ricky Proehl has been a consistent performer, with more than 50 catches and more than 650 receiving yards in six of his eight NFL seasons. There is no reason to expect anything different, although his totals may dip some if used exclusively as a third receiver.

The key to the unit is Eddie Kennison. As a rookie, he had several moments of brilliance with 924 yards receiving and 11 touchdowns—nine on receptions and two on punt returns. But he gave new meaning to “sophomore slump” in ‘97, with only 404 receiving yards and no touchdowns. Naggng knee, groin and shoulder injuries played a role in the decline. But some observers think Kennison may have taken his ‘96 success for granted. He seems to have gotten the hint, becoming a regular participant in the team’s offseason program. He needs to work on escaping the jam, running more precise routes and improving his hands.

Rookie Az-zahir Hakim could have an immediate impact as a fourth receiver and return man. He’s small, but dangerous in the open field.

At tight end, Ernie Conwell needs only to improve his pass-catching skills to become one of the league’s better tight ends. He had 38 catches last season, but easily could have added another half-dozen were it not for drops. The competition for the backup spots will be heated among Aaron Laing, Mitch Jacoby, Tyji Armstrong and rookie Roland Williams.

LINE—The biggest disappointment of the offseason was the failure to upgrade the interior of the line. After making a spirited but unsuccessful run at Washington’s Joe Patton, the Rams basically were spectators while centers and guards such as Kevin Glover, Kevin Mawae, Kevin Donnalley, Jim Pyne, Brian Habib and Aaron Taylor switched teams.

As a result, the Rams are counting on improved play from center Mike Gruttaduria and right guard Zach Wiegert, and the emergence of Ryan Tucker at left guard. Gruttaduria lacks the size and strength to out-muscle many defensive tackles, so his technique has to be sound. Wiegert’s play leveled off last season, in part because of shoulder problems. Tucker missed the first nine games last season after offseason knee surgery. He needs polish but is a tough customer.

The prime backups inside are John Gerak, last year’s starting left guard; center/guard John Flannery; and Ed Simmons, who started 13 games for the Redskins last season at tackle but is likely to play guard in St. Louis.

The Rams feel good about their tackles. On the left, 1997 No. 1 overall pick Orlando Pace should begin to blossom with a full offseason of conditioning and a training camp under his belt. At right tackle, Wayne Gandy was the team’s most consistent blocker a year ago. Fred Miller is a solid backup and spot starter.

DEFENSE

LINE—Privately, Rams officials say they’ll be better here. On paper, it’s hard to see how. Lost to Philadelphia in free agency was the team’s most consistent lineman, tackle Bill Johnson. And Vermeil released end Leslie O’Neal, citing age and attitude as factors.

Free agents Ray Agnew and Joe Phillips were added at tackle. Agnew was a backup for the Giants last season. Phillips, a former Chief, has had a good career as a run-stopper, but how much does he have left at age 35? The tackle rotation also includes undersized D’Marco Farr and underrated Jeff Zgonina.

First-round pick Grant Wistrom steps into the right end spot vacated by O’Neal. Wistrom has quickness and was known for his relentless play at Nebraska. But as a rookie, he will be hard-pressed to match the

St. Louis Rams

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
12	Banks, Tony	6-4/215	4-5-73	3	Michigan State	D2a/96	16/16
13	Bono, Steve	6-4/212	5-11-62	14	UCLA	T-GB/98	2/0*
9	Furrer, Will	6-3/215	2-5-68	6	Virginia Tech	FA/97	0/0

Running Backs

33	Harris, Derrick (FB)	6-0/252	9-18-72	3	Miami (Fla.)	D6a/96	0/0
26	Henley, June	5-10/226	9-4-75	1	Kansas	D5/97	0/0
34	Heyward, Craig (FB)	5-11/265	9-26-66	11	Pittsburgh	FA/97	16/12
25	Holcombe, Robert	5-11/220	12-11-75	R	Illinois	D2/98	—
31	Lee, Amp	5-11/200	10-1-71	7	Florida State	FA/97	16/1
44	Moore, Jerald	5-9/225	11-20-74	3	Oklahoma	D3/96	9/5
27	Priester, Raymond (FB)	6-2/242	2-3-75	R	Clemson	D5/98	—
28	Thompson, David	5-8/200	1-13-75	2	Oklahoma State	FA/97	11/0

Receivers

49	Armstrong, Tyji (TE)	6-4/250	10-3-70	6	Mississippi	FA/98	0/0*
80	Bruce, Isaac	6-0/188	11-10-72	5	Memphis State	D2/94	12/12
84	Conwell, Ernie (TE)	6-1/265	8-17-72	3	Washington	D2b/96	16/16
81	Hakim, Az-zahir	5-10/178	6-3-77	R	San Diego State	D4b/98	—
89	Jacoby, Mitch (TE)	6-4/260	12-8-73	2	Northern Illinois	FA/97	14/2
88	Kennison, Eddie	6-0/195	1-20-73	3	LSU	D1b/96	14/9
86	Laing, Aaron (TE)	6-3/260	7-19-71	4	New Mexico State	W-SD/95	15/3
87	Proehl, Ricky	6-0/190	3-7-68	9	Wake Forest	UFA/98	15/10*
86	Sellers, Donald	6-0/195	12-30-74	1	New Mexico	FA/97	0/0
83	Thomas, J.T.	5-10/180	7-11-71	4	Arizona State	D7/95	5/0
48	Williams, Roland (TE)	6-5/269	4-27-75	R	Syracuse	D4b/98	—

Offensive Linemen

63	Flannery, John (C/G)	6-3/304	1-13-69	8	Syracuse	FA/98	16/4*
70	Gandy, Wayne (T)	6-4/310	2-10-71	5	Auburn	D1/94	16/16
66	Gerak, John (G)	6-3/300	1-6-70	6	Penn State	FA/97	16/16
60	Gruttaduria, Mike (C)	6-4/297	12-6-72	3	Central Florida	FA/96	14/14
73	Miller, Fred (T)	6-7/315	2-6-73	3	Baylor	D5/96	15/7
76	Pace, Orlando (T)	6-7/320	11-4-75	2	Ohio State	D1/97	13/9
65	Rountree, Glenn (G)	6-3/304	11-24-73	R	Clemson	D6/98	—
	Simmons, Ed (G/T)	6-5/334	12-31-63	12	Eastern Washington	FA/98	14/13*
50	Tucker, Ryan (G)	6-5/305	6-12-75	2	TCU	D4/97	7/0
72	Wiegert, Zach (G)	6-4/310	8-16-72	4	Nebraska	D2a/95	15/15

Defensive Linemen

99	Agnew, Ray (T)	6-3/285	12-9-67	9	North Carolina State	UFA/98	15/0*
93	Carter, Kevin (E)	6-5/280	9-21-73	4	Florida	D1/95	16/16
75	Farr, D’Marco (T)	6-1/280	6-9-71	5	Washington	FA/94	16/16
91	Maumalanga, Chris (T)	6-3/300	12-15-71	3	Kansas	FA/97	0/0
79	Phillips, Joe (T)	6-5/305	7-15-63	13	SMU	FA/98	15/15*
92	Robinson, Bryan (E)	6-4/295	6-22-74	2	Fresno State	FA/97	11/0
94	Robinson, Jeff (E)	6-4/275	2-20-70	6	Idaho	FA/97	16/0
96	Williams, Jay (T)	6-3/280	10-13-71	4	Wake Forest	FA/96	16/2
98	Wistrom, Grant (E)	6-5/273	7-3-76	R	Nebraska	D1/98	—
90	Zgonina, Jeff (T)	6-2/300	5-24-70	6	Purdue	FA/97	15/0

Linebackers

95	Chorak, Jason	6-4/253	9-23-74	R	Washington	D7a/98	—
56	Clemons, Charlie	6-2/255	7-4-72	2	Georgia	FA/97	5/0
55	Dumas, Troy	6-3/242	9-30-72	4	Nebraska	FA/97	10/0
54	Hill, Eric	6-2/258	11-14-66	10	LSU	UFA/98	11/10*
52	Jones, Mike	6-1/240	4-15-69	7	Missouri	FA/97	16/16
59	Kazadi, Muadianvita	6-2/240	12-20-73	2	Tulsa	D6/97	12/0
57	Little, Leonard	6-3/237	10-19-74	R	Tennessee	D3/98	—
58	Phifer, Roman	6-2/240	3-5-68	8	UCLA	D2/91	16/15
51	Styles, Lorenzo	6-1/245	1-31-74	4	Ohio State	FA/97	3/0

Defensive Backs

20	Allen, Taje (CB)	5-10/185	11-6-73	2	Texas	D5/97	14/1
24	Clark, Willie (CB)	5-10/186	1-6-72	5	Notre Dame	FA/98	16/2*
22	Jenkins, Billy (S)	5-10/194	7-8-74	2	Howard	FA/97	16/2
41	Lyght, Todd (CB)	6-0/190	2-9-69	8	Notre Dame	D1/91	16/16
35	Lyle, Keith (S)	6-2/210	4-17-72	5	Virginia	D3/94	16/16
23	McBurrows, Gerald (S)	5-11/205	10-7-73	4	Kansas	D7/95	8/3
21	McCleon, Dexter (CB)	5-10/200	10-9-73	2	Clemson	D2/97	16/1
47	McNeil, Ryan (CB)	6-2/192	10-4-70	6	Miami (Fla.)	FA/97	16/16
42	Rowe, Joe (CB)	6-0/195	12-8-73	1	Virginia	FA/97	2/0
37	Scurlock, Mike (S)	5-10/200	2-26-72	4	Arizona	FA/97	5/0
32	Wright, Toby (S)	5-11/212	11-19-70	5	Nebraska	D2/94	11/11

Specialists

11	Tuten, Rick (P)	6-2/221	1-5-65	10	Florida State	UFA/98	11/0*
14	Wilkins, Jeff (K)	6-2/205	4-19-72	5	Youngstown State	FA/97	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Billy Austin, S; Donnell Baker, WR; Ethan Brooks, OT; Daryl Bush, LB; Roger Chanoine, OT; London Fletcher, LB; Tyrone Goodson, WR; Tony Horne, WR; David Kempfert, C; James Manley, DT; Jeremy McKinney, OT; Omar Morgan, CB; Tom Nutton, C; Fred Pollack, G; Matt Reem, OT; Mark Schultis, P; Corey Sears, DE; Russell Shaw, WR; Kurt Warner, QB; Glenn Young, DE.

St. Louis OFFENSE

QB Banks Bono
(C) Gruttadauria Flannery

RB Holcombe Moore

FB Heyward Priester

WR Kennison Proehl

TE Conwell Laing

LT Pace Miller

LG Tucker Gerak

C Wiegert Simmons

RG Gandy Miller

RT Bruce Hakim

CB McNeil McCleon

RE Wistrom Williams

RT Farr Agnew

LT Phillips Zgonina

LE Carter B. Robinson

CB Lyght Clark

Phifer Little

OLB Lyle McBurrows

MLB Hill Styles

SS Wright Jenkins

OLB Jones Clemons

St. Louis DEFENSE

K: Wilkins
P: Tuten
KR: Thompson, Hakim
PR: Kennison, Hakim

GRAPHIC BY MIKE IYERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Ray Agnew, DT (FA/Giants); Steve Bono, QB (trade/Packers); Willie Clark, CB (FA/Eagles); John Flannery, C/G (FA/Cowboys); Eric Hill, LB (FA/Cardinals); Joe Phillips, DT (FA/Chiefs); Ricky Proehl, WR (FA/Bears); Ed Simmons, G/T (FA/Redskins); Rick Tuten, P (FA/Seahawks).

Key losses: Keith Crawford, WR (FA/Falcons); Mike Horan, P (FA); Bill Johnson, DT (FA/Eagles); Robert Jones, LB (released); Leslie O'Neal, DE (released/Chiefs); Mark Rypien, QB (FA/Falcons); Torrance Small, WR (FA/Colts).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	Grant Wistrom	DE	Nebraska
2nd	Robert Holcombe	RB	Illinois
3rd	Leonard Little	LB	Tennessee
4th	Az-Zahir Hakim	WR	San Diego State
4th	Roland Williams	TE	Syracuse
5th	Raymond Priester	RB	Clemson
6th	Glenn Rountree	G	Clemson
7th	Jason Chorak	LB	Washington

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	RB Jerome Bettis	Starter with Steelers
1994	T Wayne Gandy	Starter with Rams
1995	DE Kevin Carter	Starter with Rams
1996	RB Lawrence Phillips	Reserve with Dolphins
	WR Eddie Kennison	Starter with Rams
1997	T Orlando Pace	Starter with Rams

Coaching Staff

Coach: Dick Vermeil. **Offensive staff:** Dick Coury (wide receivers) • Jim Hanifan (offensive line) • Wilbert Montgomery (running backs) • John Ramsdell (offensive assistant) • Jerry Rhome (offensive coordinator) • Lynn Stiles

(tight ends) • Ed White (offensive line) • Mike White (assistant head coach/quarterbacks). **Defensive staff:** Steve Brown (secondary) • John Bunting (linebackers/co-defensive coordinator) • Carl Hairston (defensive line) • Todd Howard (defensive assistant). **Others:** Chris Clausen (strength and conditioning).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 5-11 (5th in NFC West); 3-5 in division; 5-7 in conference; 2-6 at home; 3-5 on road.

1997 playoff record: None.

Vermeil's regular-season record: 5-11 in one season with Rams. 59-58 overall in seven seasons with Eagles and Rams.

Vermeil's postseason record: 3-4 in four appearances with Eagles (0-1 in Super Bowl).

Team record past five years: 27-53 (.338, ranks T26th in league in that span).

Last time made playoffs: 1989.

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*297.6	9	21
Rushing offense	*97.7	13	24
Passing offense	*199.9	8	17
Scoring offense	299	T10	T23
Total defense	*315.9	11	17
Rushing defense	*104.8	5	9
Passing defense	*211.2	12	17
Scoring defense	359	T10	T19
Takeaways	39	3	3
Giveaways	30	9	19
Turnover differential	9	3	T6
Sacks	38	T10	T18
Sacks allowed	44	T9	T18

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

No player was more proficient at gaining yards after the catch in 1997 than Rams running back Amp Lee:

Player, team	Yards after catch
Amp Lee, St. Louis	568
Shannon Sharpe, Denver	470
Kimble Anders, Kansas City	463
Ricky Watters, Philadelphia	459
Warrick Dunn, Tampa Bay	455
Irving Fryar, Philadelphia	435
Napoleon Kaufman, Oakland	428
Larry Centers, Arizona	407
Rod Smith, Denver	402
Marshall Faulk, Indianapolis	398

1998 Schedule

All times are for home team.

Sept. 6	NEW ORLEANS	12:01
Sept. 13	MINNESOTA	12:01
Sept. 20	at Buffalo	1:01
Sept. 27	ARIZONA	12:01
Oct. 4	Open date	
Oct. 11	N.Y. JETS	3:15
Oct. 18	at Miami	4:15
Oct. 25	SAN FRANCISCO	12:01
Nov. 1	at Atlanta	1:01
Nov. 8	at Chicago	12:01
Nov. 15	at New Orleans	12:01
Nov. 22	CAROLINA	3:05
Nov. 29	ATLANTA	12:01
Dec. 3	at Philadelphia (Thur.)	8:20
Dec. 13	NEW ENGLAND	12:01
Dec. 20	at Carolina	1:01
Dec. 27	at San Francisco	1:05

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T20TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	NEW ORLEANS	W	38-24
Sept. 7	SAN FRANCISCO	L	12-15
Sept. 14	at Denver	L	14-35
Sept. 21	N.Y. GIANTS	W	13-3
Sept. 28	at Oakland	L	17-35
Oct. 5	Open date		
Oct. 12	at San Francisco	L	10-30
Oct. 19	SEATTLE	L	9-17
Oct. 26	KANSAS CITY	L	20-28
Nov. 2	at Atlanta	L	31-34
Nov. 9	at Green Bay	L	7-17
Nov. 16	ATLANTA	L	21-27
Nov. 23	CAROLINA	L	10-16
Nov. 30	at Washington	W	23-20
Dec. 7	at New Orleans	W	34-27
Dec. 14	CHICAGO	L	10-13
Dec. 20	at Carolina	W	30-18

Miscellaneous

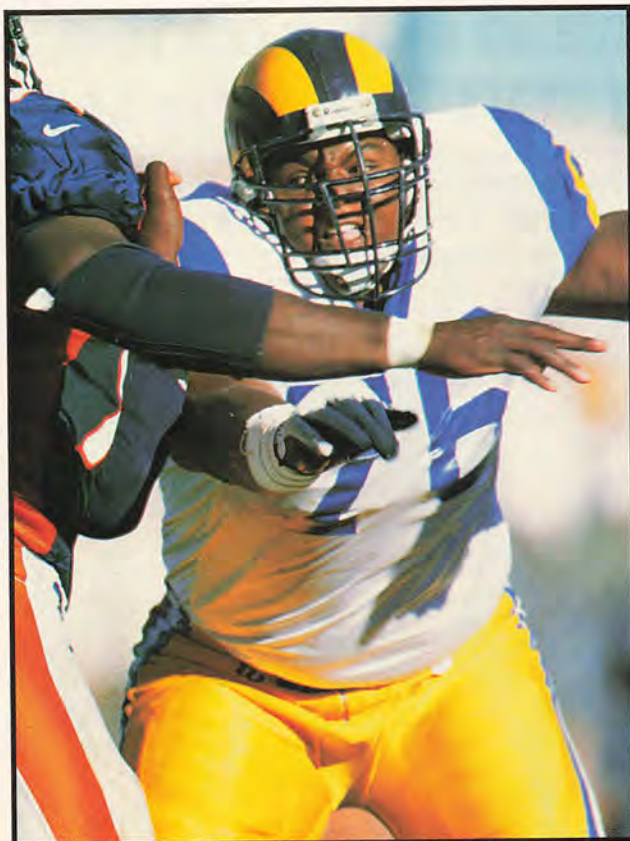
Owner: Georgia Frontiere.

Stadium (capacity, surface): Trans World Dome (66,000, artificial).

Ticket information: 314-425-8830.

Flagship radio station: KFNS-AM, 590.

Training site: Western Illinois University, Macomb, Ill.; 314-982-7267.



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

Pace was adequate at left tackle last season, but the Rams are expecting more this season and a full training camp should help.

10 sacks posted by O'Neal last season. Jay Williams could be used on running downs in place of Wistrom, who plans to play at about 15 pounds heavier (270) than he did in college.

Manning left end once again is Kevin Carter, who has had three solid, if unspectacular, seasons with the Rams.

The Rams finished in the bottom fifth in the league in sacks, and it's hard to imagine them doing much better unless Wistrom is an instant hit and the tackle rotation clicks.

LINEBACKERS—If free agent Eric Hill stays healthy and plays up to form at middle linebacker, the Rams should be tougher to run against. And they weren't bad in '97, finishing ninth in rushing defense and yielding 3.8 yards a carry. Hill is a bit bigger and more instinctive than the player he replaces—Robert Jones. The Rams also hope Hill brings some leadership to a defense lacking in that area.

The starting outside guys, Mike Jones and Roman Phifer, are a tad undersized to take on tight ends but are above average in coverage skills, particularly Jones. The two played more than 93 percent of the defensive snaps last season, as much by necessity as anything.

If rookies Leonard Little and Jason Chorak prove to be quick studies, the team could have some depth for the first time in years. Little played end and middle linebacker at Tennessee. Both will learn outside linebacker while seeing spot duty as speed rushers.

Lorenzo Styles is the top candidate to back up Hill inside, but keep an eye on rookie free agent Daryl Bush.

SECONDARY—This group make plays. Unfortunately, some of them are bad. The defensive backs get most of the credit for the team's 25 interceptions a year ago, which tied for second in the league. Cornerback Ryan McNeil led the league with nine interceptions, and free safety Keith Lyle tied for second with eight. Lyle has more interceptions the past three seasons (20) than any player in the league.

But the secondary also gets most of the blame for the 26 touchdown passes allowed, the fourth-highest total in the league. Sure, there was the team's low sack total and a defensive style that can put a lot of pressure on the corners. But blown coverages and an overall lack of speed also took their toll.

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	B	Defensive line:	C
Offensive backfield:	C-	Linebackers:	C+
Offensive line:	C	Secondary:	B-
Receivers:	B-	Special teams:	C

McNeil and fellow starter Todd Lyght are above-average corners, but neither has the speed or consistency to be a shut-down corner.

Strong safety is a question entering camp. Hard-hitting Toby Wright, the primary starter the past three seasons, may miss all or part of camp as he recovers from knee surgery. Billy Jenkins Jr. played surprisingly well in Wright's place the final two games of the season. Another candidate is Gerald McBurrows, who has 13 starts in three NFL seasons, most as a replacement for the injured Wright. But McBurrows missed the final eight games last season with a knee injury. Second-year players Dexter McCleon and Taje Allen and free agent Willie Clark will battle for the nickel and dime spots.

SPECIAL TEAMS

This was a disaster area early in 1997, but that shouldn't be the case this season. Rick Tuten, signed as a free agent from Seattle, will provide the best punting the Rams have had since Sean Landeta.

And hopefully the worst is over for Jeff Wilkins. Two years ago as a 49er, he made 30-of-34 field-goal attempts. He was on a similar pace with the Rams last season but missed 9-of-16 attempts between Games 10 and 15. He closed the season by making 3-of-3 in the finale against Carolina—all from more than 40 yards.

The promotion of Thompson to the active roster after five games added some life to the kick-return unit. Thompson lacks sprinter's speed but has good acceleration and is elusive. He averaged 24.6 yards a return the last seven games—quite an improvement for a squad that struggled to get the ball beyond the 20 in the early games.

Receivers J.T. Thomas and Hakim are the leading candidates to be paired with Thompson. Based on what he did in college, Hakim, who averaged 25 yards a return at San Diego State, has more explosiveness than Thomas. Kennison will return punts, with the Rams hoping he displays his form of 1996, when he averaged 14.6 yards a return, and not '97, when he plummeted to 7.3 yards a return.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

On paper, at least, the Rams have a chance. Ten of 16 games will be against opponents who had losing records in 1997. Only two opponents won as many as 10 games. And four of the first five games are at home, so the Rams could start with some momentum. Despite the string of sellouts, the Rams haven't established much of a home-field advantage in St. Louis: They are 10-14 at home and 8-16 on the road since leaving Los Angeles.

After opening with New Orleans at home for the second consecutive season, the Rams don't see another NFC West team until San Francisco visits in late October. That closes out a tough three-game stretch in which the Rams also host the Jets and travel to Miami.

Six of the final nine are on the road. But playing at Atlanta, Chicago and New Orleans in succession in November may not be that tough.

Catching San Francisco at 3Com Park in the finale actually may be a break. The 49ers—who have beaten the Rams 15 consecutive times—usually have a playoff berth wrapped up by then and trot out their junior varsity.

BOTTOM LINE

This is a critical year for several young players, a veteran coaching staff and the franchise as a whole in St. Louis. The offensive line, featuring youngsters Pace and Tucker, needs to grow up in a hurry. If the line can keep Banks on his feet and provide some cracks for Holcombe and Moore, the Rams could be better than advertised. If not, they're looking at a ninth consecutive losing season.

TSN

Jim Thomas covers the Rams for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.



Youngsters will have to play a big role, but group of aging stars still is the key

PREDICTED DIVISION FINISH: 1st

BY KEVIN LYNCH

Competing interests will be at play when the 49ers' formidable offense takes the field this year. The main combatants will be wide receiver Jerry Rice and running back Garrison Hearst, who each will want his share of the football. There might be enough leather to go around, but the 49ers more likely will be entangled in the classic battle of whether to emphasize the running game or the passing game.

Last season, the 49ers clearly emphasized the run after Rice was injured in the season opener. With inexperienced receivers taking Rice's place and Hearst in the mix, the Niners ran more than passed for the first time since 1992.

In '98, the running game will get the first shot at dominating the offense. While coach Steve Mariucci has been schooled in Bill Walsh's West Coast scheme, Mariucci also was with the Rams in 1984 when run-oriented coach John Robinson was calling the shots. If he could get away with it, Mariucci would run every play in order to dominate time of possession. But Mariucci also feels the pull from the history of the 49ers' glamorous passing game. He even has flirted with the idea of using a three-receiver set on first and second downs.

But after three consecutive playoff oustings by the Packers, Mariucci realizes that to get over the green-and-gold hurdle, the 49ers must run effectively to keep their aging defense fresh. Therefore, Rice isn't likely to get his usual share of the offense, unless the running game isn't producing at all.

COACHING

If Mariucci proved anything in his rookie season, it's that he'll do whatever it takes to win. With a veteran team, he was wise enough to rest the team in practice. And often he just got out of the way and let the veterans run things for a while.

He gained respect from the players by not panicking when the team lost Steve Young, Rice and its opening game all on the same afternoon in Tampa. And Mariucci made the proper adjustments to an offense that didn't have Rice. Mariucci rarely was outcoached on game days, but he did take a back seat to his old boss, Mike Holmgren, in the NFC title game. The Packers surprised the 49ers' defense with a game plan that emphasized a quick-striking passing game when the Niners were expecting the Packers to run.

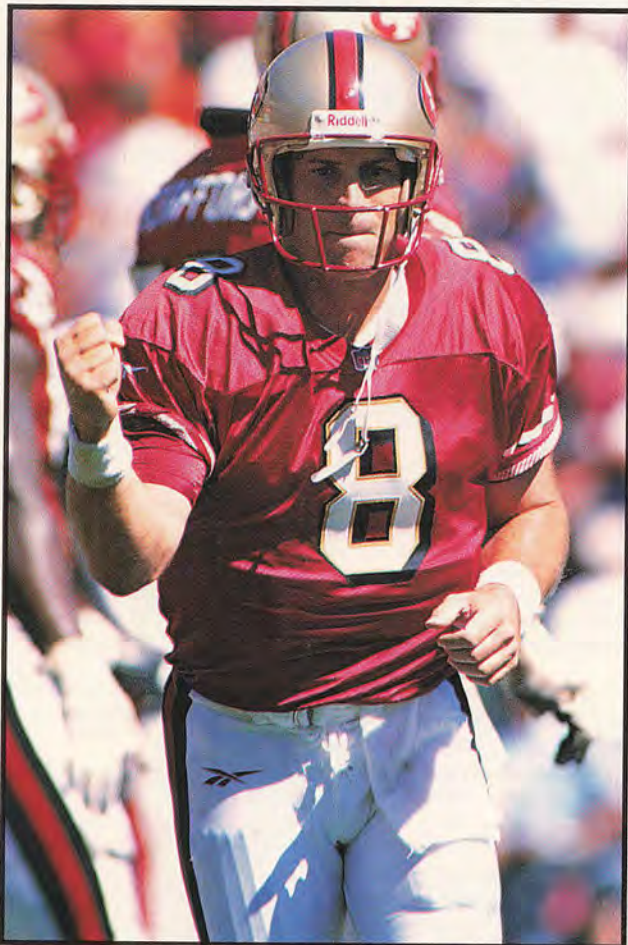
But a 13-3 record in a season that started with adversity reflects Mariucci's strong character. And with experience, he should only get better.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS—Young needs a strong running game to be a championship-caliber quarterback these days. He routinely wins the passer title, but he has lost the long-ball touch he had a few seasons ago. Coaches have said that in games, Young's main objective is to stay away from throwing interceptions. But he might regain confidence in the deep passing game with a healthy Rice and a more wide-open game plan.

Young will be encouraged to play with abandon now that the 49ers have a proven backup in Ty Detmer. Detmer, a former Eagles starter, lends intelligence and leadership, and the 49ers hope some of those qualities rub off on Jim Druckenmiller, who still is ticketed as the future starter.

RUNNING BACKS—Talented but vulnerable are adjectives that best describe the running game. Despite missing the last three games of the season because of a broken collarbone, Hearst was the first 49er to gain 1,000 yards since Ricky Watters in 1993. Hearst's first two sea-



Advancing years have robbed Young of some of his long-ball touch, but he can be effective if there's a complementary ground attack.

sons in the league were marred by a knee injury. But the 49ers are banking on him staying healthy—the team signed him to a five-year, \$15.1 million deal in the offseason. Coaches believe Hearst could be the most talented back in the team's modern era.

The new starter at fullback is Marc Edwards, who'll replace William Floyd, who left for the Panthers in free agency. Edwards is quicker and has better receiving skills than Floyd, but Edwards isn't as good a blocker, which will be his main responsibility.

Chuck Levy, perhaps the fastest player on the roster, has experience as a wide receiver, making him a tantalizing target out of the backfield. He could be the third-down back if his blocking improves.

Beyond these three, undersized rookie fullback Fred Beasley is the only viable backup, and he has a tough task ahead in learning the complicated offense. The battle for the third-string running back position will be among Shon Mitchell, Reynard Rutherford and rookie free agent Pepe Pearson.

RECEIVERS—No one is anticipating Rice's return more than Rice, who is up to his usual maniacal preparation. Even though Rice, 35, is coming off two major knee surgeries, expect him to resume his brilliant career with nary a problem. The greatest concern is how well he'll

retain his speed. If Rice doesn't get down the field effectively, he could cause Young unneeded headaches.

J.J. Stokes and Terrell Owens proved more than adequate last season as Rice's replacements. But Young never gained the confidence in them he had in Rice and John Taylor.

Stokes, a former first-round pick, has played well after a slow start to his pro career. Still, Owens is the team's future at receiver and he has shown big-play talent in his first two seasons. The team is considering going with a three-receiver offense to get Rice, Owens and Stokes on the field at the same time.

The Niners haven't been happy with fourth receiver Iheanyi Uwaezuoke, who missed team meetings around playoff time. He also had fumbling problems as a punt returner. Yet Uwaezuoke represents the 49ers' true deep threat. Uwaezuoke must prove himself in camp to make the roster; he'll get competition from rookie Ryan Thelwell.

At tight end, the receiving talents of the retired Brent Jones will be missed. Greg Clark caught only a handful of passes as a rookie last year, and he won't be as productive a receiver as Jones. But Clark's blocking should make up for it. Free-agent signee Irv Smith also is expected to see plenty of time.

LINE—The 49ers always have chosen to spend resources on skill positions rather than the line. That has changed somewhat over the past three seasons. The team has signed two big guards (Ray Brown and Kevin Gogan) in recent seasons, then picked three linemen in this year's draft.

The 49ers still like to throw screen passes and run sweeps, plays in which tackle Derrick Deese and center Chris Dalman excel. Yet the hulking Gogan is much better at straight-ahead blocking, which the staff has tried to incorporate.

With the team's abundance of weapons, this line will not drag anyone down. Gogan was elected to the Pro Bowl last season. Brown turned in a Pro Bowl-caliber season. And Dalman's play at center is underrated. Deese is a tremendous athlete who moved from left to right tackle to make way for new acquisition Jamie Brown. The former Bronco has pleased 49ers coaches with his size (6-8, 318) and quick feet. Yet there are differing opinions. If Brown is as good as the 49ers attest, why did Denver coach Mike Shanahan, known as a keen evaluator of talent, let him go for a second-round pick?

Three rookies—center Jeremy Newberry, guard Phil Ostrowski and tackle Chris Ruhman—are expected to contribute this season unless there are injuries. Newberry looks to be the most polished of the three. With the rookies nearly guaranteed roster spots, Tim Hanshaw, Frank Pollack and Joe Rudolph will have to battle to remain on the roster.

DEFENSE

LINE—The loss of tackle Dana Stubblefield to the Redskins in free agency was the biggest blow of the offseason. Stubblefield, the league's reigning defensive player of the year, could plug the run and rush the passer (15 sacks last year).

Junior Bryant (278 pounds) will replace Stubblefield, meaning the 49ers will give away 15 pounds in the center of their defense. But Bryant is a talented player who actually may provide more consistent effort than Stubblefield. The 49ers also signed former Lion Shane Bonham, who can play all four line positions. The high-intensity Bonham will spell Bryant often at tackle.

San Francisco 49ers

Quarterbacks

No.	Name	Ht./Wt.	Born	NFL Exp.	College	How acq.	'97 GP/GS
11	Detmer, Ty	6-0/194	10-30-67	7	Brigham Young	FA/98	8/7*
14	Druckenmiller, Jim	6-4/241	9-19-72	2	Virginia Tech	D1/97	4/1
8	Young, Steve	6-2/215	10-11-61	14	Brigham Young	T-TB/87	15/15

Running Backs

40	Beasley, Fred (FB)	6-0/220	9-18-74	R	Auburn	D6/98	—
44	Edwards, Marc (FB)	6-0/229	11-17-74	2	Notre Dame	D2/97	15/1
20	Hearst, Garrison	5-11/219	1-4-71	6	Georgia	FA/97	13/13
32	Levy, Chuck (KR)	6-0/206	1-7-72	3	Arizona	FA/96	14/0
22	Mitchell, Shon	6-1/218	10-8-73	1	Texas	FA/98	0/0*
33	Rutherford, Reynard	6-0/210	5-15-73	1	California	FA/98	0/0*

Receivers

85	Clark, Greg (TE)	6-4/251	4-7-72	2	Stanford	D3/97	15/4
86	Fann, Chad (TE)	6-3/256	6-7-70	5	Florida A&M	FA/97	11/0
88	Harris, Mark	6-4/201	4-28-70	2	Stanford	FA/97	10/0
81	Owens, Terrell	6-3/217	12-7-73	3	UT-Chattanooga	D3/96	16/15
80	Rice, Jerry	6-2/196	10-13-62	14	Mississippi Valley State	D1/85	2/1
82	Smith, Irv (TE)	6-3/262	10-13-71	6	Notre Dame	FA/98	11/8*
83	Stokes, J.J.	6-4/223	10-6-72	4	UCLA	D1/95	16/16
18	Thelwell, Ryan	6-2/188	4-6-73	3	Minnesota	D7/98	—
89	Uwaezuoke, Iheanyi	6-2/198	7-24-73	R	California	D5/96	14/0

Offensive Linemen

72	Brown, Jamie (T)	6-8/318	4-24-72	4	Florida A&M	T-Den/98	11/2*
65	Brown, Ray (G)	6-5/318	12-12-62	13	Arkansas State	FA/96	15/15
67	Dalman, Chris (C)	6-3/297	3-15-70	6	Stanford	D6/93	13/13
63	Deese, Derrick (T)	6-3/289	5-17-70	7	USC	FA/92	16/13
66	Gogan, Kevin (G)	6-7/325	11-2-64	11	Washington	FA/97	16/16
77	Hanshaw, Tim (G)	6-5/302	4-27-70	3	Brigham Young	D4/95	13/3
62	Newberry, Jeremy (C)	6-5/315	3-23-76	R	California	D2/98	—
69	Ostrowski, Phil (G)	6-4/291	9-23-75	R	Penn State	D5/98	—
75	Pollack, Frank (T)	6-5/295	11-5-67	7	Northern Arizona	FA/94	16/0
60	Rudolph, Joe (G)	6-2/284	7-21-72	3	Wisconsin	FA/97	6/1
78	Ruhman, Chris (T)	6-5/321	12-19-74	R	Texas A&M	D3/98	—

Defensive Linemen

92	Barker, Roy (E)	6-5/290	2-14-69	7	North Carolina	FA/96	13/12
94	Bonham, Shane (T)	6-2/286	10-18-70	5	Tennessee	FA/98	16/0*
	Buckner, Brentson (T)	6-2/315	9-30-71	5	Clemson	FA/98	14/5*
90	Bryant, Junior (T)	6-4/278	1-16-71	4	Notre Dame	FA/93	16/3
56	Doleman, Chris (E)	6-5/289	10-16-61	14	Pittsburgh	FA/96	16/16
91	Price, Daryl (E)	6-3/287	10-23-72	3	Colorado	D4/96	4/0
71	Reese, Albert (T)	6-6/294	4-29-73	2	Grambling State	FA/97	5/0
93	Thornton, Carlos (T)	6-4/308	4-23-74	1	Alcorn State	FA/97	0/0
98	Wilkins, Gabe (E)	6-5/315	9-1-71	5	Gardner-Webb (N.C.)	FA/98	16/16*
95	Wilson, Troy (E)	6-4/257	11-22-70	4	Pittsburg (Kan.) State	FA/98	0/0*
97	Young, Bryant (T)	6-3/291	1-27-72	5	Notre Dame	D1/94	12/12

Linebackers

58	Bradford, Vincent	6-2/231	1-22-73	2	Arkansas	FA/97	0/0
57	Kirk, Randy	6-2/242	12-27-64	11	San Diego State	FA/96	16/0
51	Norton, Ken	6-2/254	9-29-66	11	UCLA	FA/94	16/16
52	Schwartz, Jim	6-2/240	1-23-70	5	Purdue	FA/97	16/0
50	Peterson, Anthony	6-1/232	1-23-72	5	Notre Dame	T-Chi/98	16/0*
55	Tubbs, Winfred	6-4/260	9-24-70	5	Texas	FA/98	16/16*
53	Williams, James	6-0/246	10-10-68	8	Mississippi State	FA/98	16/0*
54	Woodall, Lee	6-1/224	10-31-69	5	West Chester (Pa.)	D6/94	16/16

Defensive Backs

31	Bronson, Zack (S)	6-1/191	1-28-74	2	McNeese State	FA/97	16/0
28	Buckley, Curtis (S)	6-0/182	9-25-70	6	East Texas State	FA/96	15/0
36	Hanks, Merton (S)	6-2/181	3-12-68	8	Iowa	D5/91	16/16
43	Langham, Antonio (CB)	6-0/184	7-31-72	5	Alabama	FA/98	16/15*
46	McDonald, Tim (S)	6-2/219	1-6-65	12	USC	FA/93	15/15
21	McQuarters, R.W. (CB)	5-9/198	12-21-76	R	Oklahoma State	D1/98	—
23	Pope, Marquez (CB)	5-11/193	10-29-70	6	Fresno State	FA/95	5/5
30	Schulters, Lance (S)	6-2/188	5-27-75	R	Hofstra	D4/98	—
38	Walker, Darnell (CB)	5-8/167	1-17-70	6	Oklahoma	FA/97	16/11

Specialists

1	Becksvort, John (K)	6-1/197	2-26-73	1	Tennessee	FA/98	0/0*
2	Lindsey, Steve (K)	6-0/166	11-25-74	R	Mississippi	FA/98	—
3	Thompson, Tommy (P)	5-10/179	4-27-72	4	Oregon	FA/95	16/0

Other free agents invited to camp

Plez Atkins, CB; Brock Blachford, TE; Tony Blevins, CB; Mario Bradley, S; Thad Busby, QB; Craig Charles, DE; Andy Clifton, LB; Bill Duff, DT; Curtis Eason, DT; Dan Finn, G; Dave Fiore, OT; Reggie Givens, LB; Dwight Henry, CB; Karl Lerum, WR; Kelly Malveaux, CB; Kevin McKenzie, WR; Jim Nelson, LB; Brandon Noble, DT; Brock Olivo, RB; Pepe Pearson, RB; Tucker Phillips, P; Jeff Posey, DE; Shawn Scales, WR; Ed Scissum, FB; Curtis Shearer, WR; Tyrone Smith, DB; Vernon Strickland, LB; Hurley Tarver, CB.

*—Not with 49ers in 1997.

San Francisco OFFENSE

Hearst Levy
RB

Edwards Beasley
FB

Owens Stokes
WR

J. Brown Ruhman
LT

R. Brown Hanshaw
LG

(QB) Young Detmer
(C) Dalman Newberry
QB

Gagan Ostrowski
RG

Deese Pollack
RT

Clark Smith
TE

Rice Uwaezuoke
WR

Langham McQuarters
CB

Wilkins Price
RE

Bryant Bonham
RT

Young Reese
LT

Barker Doleman
LE

Pope Walker
CB

Probable starters listed on top

Norton Schwantz
WLB

Hanks Bronson
FS

Tubbs Peterson
MLB

McDonald Schulters
SS

Woodall Williams
SLB

K: Becksvoort/Lindsey
P: Thompson
KR: Levy
PR: McQuarters

San Francisco DEFENSE

GRAPHIC BY MIKE INVERGES / TSN

DATA

Comings and Goings

Key additions: Shane Bonham, DE (FA/Lions); Jamie Brown, OT (trade/Broncos); Brentson Buckner, DT (FA/Bengals); Ty Detmer, QB (FA/Eagles); Antonio Langham, CB (FA/Ravens); Anthony Peterson, LB (trade/Bears); Irv Smith, TE (FA/Saints); Winfred Tubbs, LB (FA/Saints); Gabe Wilkins, DE (FA/Packers).

Key losses: Gary Anderson, K (FA/Vikings); Jeff Brohm, QB (released/Bucs); Tyrone Drakeford, CB (FA/Saints); William Floyd, FB (FA/Panthers); Kevin Greene, LB (released/Panthers); Brett Jones, TE (retired); Terry Kirby, RB (released); Brett Maxie, S (retired); Rod Milstead, G (FA/Redskins); Kevin Mitchell, LB (FA/Saints); Gary Plummer, LB (retired); Jesse Sapola, C (FA); Kirk Scraftford, OT (retired); Dana Stubblefield, DT (FA/Redskins); Marvin Washington, DE (FA/Broncos); Rod Woodson, CB (released/Ravens).

Draft Picks

Rd.	Name	Pos.	School
1st	R.W. McQuarters	CB	Oklahoma State
2nd	Jeremy Newberry	C	California
3rd	Chris Ruhman	T	Texas A&M
4th	Lance Schulters	S	Hofstra
5th	Phil Ostrowski	G	Penn State
6th	Fred Beasley	RB	Auburn
7th	Ryan Thelwell	WR	Minnesota

Past Five No. 1 Picks

Yr.	Name	Status
1993	DT Dana Stubblefield	Starter with Redskins
	DE Todd Kelly	Out of football
1994	DT Bryant Young	Starter with 49ers
	FB William Floyd	Starter with Panthers
1995	WR J.J. Stokes	Reserve with 49ers
1996	None	
1997	QB Jim Druckenmiller	Reserve with 49ers

Coaching Staff

Coach: Steve Mariucci. **Offensive staff:** Larry Kirksey (wide receivers) • Greg Knapp (offensive assistant/quarterbacks) •

Bobb McKittrick (offensive line) • Marty Mornhinweg (offensive coordinator/quarterbacks) • Pat Morris (tight ends/assistant offensive line) • Tom Rathman (running backs) • Andy Sugarman (quality control/offense). **Defensive staff:** Dwaine Board (defensive line) • Jamie Hill (quality control/defense) • John Marshall (defensive coordinator) • Bill McPherson (defensive assistant) • Jim Mora Jr. (defensive backs) • Richard Smith (linebackers). **Others:** Jerry Attaway (physical development coordinator) • Mike Barnes (strength development coordinator) • George Stewart (special teams).

Records/Rankings

1997 regular-season record: 13-3 (1st in NFC West); 8-0 in division; 11-1 in conference; 8-0 at home; 5-3 on road.

1997 playoff record: Defeated Vikings, 30-22, in divisional game; lost to Packers, 23-10, in NFC championship game.

Mariucci's regular-season record: 13-3 in one season with 49ers.

Mariucci's postseason record: 1-1 in one playoff appearance with 49ers.

Team record past five years: 59-21 (.738, ranks 1st in league in that span).

Last time missed playoffs: 1991

1997 team rankings:	No.	NFC	NFL
Total offense	*319.5	5	12
Rushing offense	*123.1	4	8
Passing offense	*196.4	9	T18
Scoring offense	375	3	T5
Total defense	*250.8	1	1
Rushing defense	*85.4	1	2
Passing defense	*165.4	2	2
Scoring defense	265	T2	T3
Takeaways	41	2	2
Giveaways	20	2	T2
Turnover differential	21	2	2
Sacks	54	T3	T3
Sacks allowed	44	T9	T18

*Yards per game.

Numbers Game

The 49ers have the NFL's best home record this decade:

Team	Record	Win. pct.
San Francisco	53-11	.828
Kansas City	52-12	.813
Pittsburgh	51-13	.797
Denver	49-15	.766
Buffalo	48-16	.750
Dallas	47-17	.734
Green Bay	47-17	.734
Miami	43-21	.672
Philadelphia	43-21	.672
Detroit	42-22	.656

1998 Schedule

All times for home team.

Sept. 6	N.Y. JETS	1:15
Sept. 14	at Washington (Mon.)	8:20
Sept. 20	Open date	
Sept. 27	ATLANTA	1:15
Oct. 4	at Buffalo	1:01
Oct. 11	at New Orleans	12:01
Oct. 18	INDIANAPOLIS	1:05
Oct. 25	at St. Louis	12:01
Nov. 1	at Green Bay	3:15
Nov. 8	CAROLINA	1:05
Nov. 15	at Atlanta	1:01
Nov. 22	NEW ORLEANS	5:20
Nov. 30	N.Y. GIANTS (Mon.)	5:20
Dec. 6	at Carolina	1:01
Dec. 14	DETROIT (Mon.)	5:20
Dec. 20	at New England	1:01
Dec. 27	ST. LOUIS	1:05

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE: T27TH.

1997 Results

Aug. 31	at Tampa Bay	L	6-13
Sept. 7	at St. Louis	W	15-12
Sept. 14	NEW ORLEANS	W	33-7
Sept. 21	ATLANTA	W	34-7
Sept. 29	at Carolina	W	34-21
Oct. 5	Open date		
Oct. 12	ST. LOUIS	W	30-10
Oct. 19	at Atlanta	W	35-28
Oct. 26	at New Orleans	W	23-0
Nov. 2	DALLAS	W	17-10
Nov. 10	at Philadelphia	W	24-12
Nov. 16	CAROLINA	W	27-19
Nov. 23	SAN DIEGO	W	17-10
Nov. 30	at Kansas City	L	9-44
Dec. 7	MINNESOTA	W	28-17
Dec. 15	DENVER	W	34-17
Dec. 21	at Seattle	L	9-38
Jan. 3	MINNESOTA*	W	38-22
Jan. 11	GREEN BAY†	L	10-23

*NFC divisional playoff game.

†NFC championship game.

Miscellaneous

Owners: Edward J. DeBartolo Jr.; Denise DeBartolo York
Stadium (capacity, surface): 3Com Park at Candlestick Point (70,270, grass)

Ticket information: 415-468-2249

Flagship radio station: KGO-AM, 810.

Training site: University of Pacific, Stockton, Calif.



The departure of Dana Stubblefield means there will be more pressure on Young to get the job done on the defensive line.

Bryant Young looked amazingly quick in minicamps, and the Niners hope he stays healthy. A healthy Young can be one of the most dominant players in the league. With the loss of Kevin Greene through free agency and without Stubblefield and possibly end Chris Doleman, who was asking for a contract renegotiation and considering retirement, Young will have to provide the bulk of the pass rush.

End Roy Barker was bothered by heel and leg problems last season, but the 49ers are committed to him. Barker had a career-high 12½ sacks in 1996, and coaches would like to see him return to that level.

Free-agent acquisition Gabe Wilkins was signed away from Green Bay and is expected to start at end. But he had offseason knee surgery and isn't expected back until the last exhibition game. If Doleman doesn't agree to a restructured contract and Wilkins' knee problems persist, the line will be in trouble.

LINEBACKERS—One offensive coordinator who prepared for the 49ers last season labeled this unit mediocre. While that might be an overstatement, the 49ers hope to improve the corps by adding free agent Winfred Tubbs, who was the Saints' defensive linchpin last season. He will be saddled with learning the team's complicated "mike" inside linebacker spot. But once Tubbs grasps the scheme, coaches expect great things.

Ken Norton may be the best free-agent signing the team has had. He hasn't missed a game in four seasons, and he routinely leads the Niners in tackles. He's also a fiery leader. So far, Norton, 31, hasn't shown his age.

If coaches can use Lee Woodall properly, he can be effective. Early in the season, the 225-pound Woodall took on offensive linemen and was being lifted on certain downs to accommodate Greene. Later, Woodall's play improved when he was on the field more and could use his speed in pursuit.

The re-acquisition of Anthony Peterson will give the linebackers an experienced backup at all three positions. Jim Schwantz and James Williams were used mainly as special teamers last year, but Schwantz was effective as a linebacker with Dallas in 1996.

Tubbs' backup might be a problem. While Peterson can do it, he isn't a long-term answer. This uncertainty has given Vernon Strickland an

GRADING OUT

Coaching staff:	A-	Defensive line:	B
Offensive backfield:	B	Linebackers:	B-
Offensive line:	B	Secondary:	B+
Receivers:	A-	Special teams:	B

opportunity to make the team.

The Niners will miss Gary Plummer, who retired. One teammate said that even at 37, Plummer was the 49ers' best linebacker last season.

SECONDARY—The strength of the defense could shift from the line to the defensive backfield this year. But that may depend on cornerback Marquez Pope. He needs to regain his bullying, opportunistic style of play. Pope was injured for most of last season, then returned without his confidence.

At the other corner, the 49ers are expecting big things from free-agent acquisition Antonio Langham, who was tough on his jams and polished in coverage during minicamps.

In reserve, Darnell Walker played surprisingly well as a stand-in for Pope last year. And this year's first-round pick, R.W. McQuarters, will compete for nickel back responsibilities.

The team can depend on strong safety Tim McDonald being the leader of the defense. When the 12-year veteran finally calls it quits, he'll be extremely hard to replace.

Once again there's a concern about depth. Pro Bowl free safety Merton Hanks didn't help matters by tearing a pectoral muscle lifting weights in the offseason. Hanks hopes to return by the time camp opens. If he doesn't, there isn't a clear replacement. Second-year man Zack Bronson still has a lot to learn, Curtis Buckley is viewed as a special teams player and fourth-round pick Lance Schulters is, well, a fourth-round pick who played at a Division I-AA school (Hofstra).

SPECIAL TEAMS

Questions loom about this unit. Can kickers John Becksvort or Steve Lindsey exhibit poise in the slop and wind at 3Com Park? Will McQuarters be the answer as a punt returner? Will punter Tommy Thompson regain consistency now that he doesn't have to kick off? About the only sure thing entering the season is that the 49ers are comfortable with Levy as the kick returner.

The team is changing its kicking philosophy by going with Lindsey, an undrafted rookie, or Becksvort, a first-year player who hasn't attempted a field goal in the NFL. The team always felt it needed a veteran to contend with 3Com's elements. Now, the 49ers want a young kicker who also can boom kickoffs.

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The early-season schedule appears favorable. The 49ers don't face a team that made the playoffs last season until they meet the Packers on November 1 in Green Bay.

The first two games are against the Jets and Washington. But after that, the 49ers should be able to go into coast mode with games against Atlanta, Buffalo, New Orleans, Indianapolis and St. Louis.

In the second half, the 49ers have two crucial matchups with Carolina and also play the Giants. And the December 20 contest at New England could be the 49ers' first sub-freezing game since the 1989 conference title game in Chicago.

BOTTOM LINE

The 49ers had tremendous turnover in the offseason, but the upshot was that they got younger. Still, the team will rely on its aging stars—Rice, Young, McDonald and Norton—to get the job done. There's still more than enough top-level talent on this team to contend, and with other top-echelon NFC clubs weakening, the 49ers could find themselves back in the Super Bowl.

TSN

Kevin Lynch covers the 49ers for the Oakland Tribune.

1999 Draft Preview 1999 Draft Preview 1999 Draft Preview

COMPILED BY MEL KIPER JR., OF MEL KIPER ENTERPRISES, INC. AND ESPN.

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS

1. ^Tim Couch, Kentucky 6-5/220 Could be the next franchise QB.
2. Daunte Culpepper, Central Florida 6-3/240 Physical skills are top drawer.
3. Cade McNown, UCLA 6-0/208 In the Mark Brunell mold.
4. Donovan McNabb, Syracuse 6-2/222 Possible first- or second-rounder.
5. Brock Huard, Washington 6-4/223 One of the top deep passers in the game.
6. *Chad Hutchinson, Stanford 6-4/230 Could be a gem, although baseball is an option.
7. Michael Bishop, Kansas State 6-2/210 Combines a live arm with mobility.
8. Scott Covington, Miami (Fla.) 6-2/208 This is his year to shine.
9. Ted White, Howard 6-3/224 Sleeper with raw tools.
10. Shaun King, Tulane 6-2/200 Showed tremendous improvement last year.

HALFBACKS

1. Ricky Williams, Texas 6-0/230 Could be one of the first few players selected.
2. ^Ron Dayne, Wisconsin 5-9/258 Powerhouse when he's at full strength.
3. ^J.R. Redmond, Arizona State 5-11/191 Explodes to daylight.
4. *Amos Zereoue, West Virginia 5-8/190 Makes people miss with the best of them.
5. *Shaun Alexander, Alabama 6-0/208 Physically, he may be the best RB in the country.
6. Kevin Faulk, LSU 5-10/195 Quick, elusive and tough.
7. *De'Mond Parker, Oklahoma 5-10/189 Home run potential on each carry.
8. *Rondell Mealey, LSU 5-11/203 Could star if he were the feature back.
9. Damon Washington, Colorado State 6-1/194 Quality athletic talent.
10. Michael Perry, Rice 5-11/187 Speed to the outside is his forte.
11. Stacey Mack, Temple 6-0/223 Combines power with athleticism.
12. Michael Basnight, NC A&T 6-1/235 Quality small-college RB.
13. Sirr Parker, Texas A&M 6-0/181 Productive north-south runner.
14. Autry Denson, Notre Dame 5-9/185 Quick, creative scatback-type.
15. Mike Cloud, Boston College 5-10/198 Keeps the chains moving.
16. Joe Montgomery, Ohio State 5-10/218 Worth keeping a close eye on.
17. James Johnson, Mississippi State 6-2/225 Size-speed ratio gets your attention.
18. Terry Jackson, Florida 5-10/200 Versatility is a major plus.
19. Madre Hill, Arkansas 5-11/198 Hopefully, he's back at full strength.
20. Clarence Williams, Michigan 5-9/184 Excellent receiving back.

FULLBACKS

1. Rob Konrad, Syracuse 6-2/248 Similar to former NFL star John Riggins.
2. Jeff Paulk, Arizona State 6-0/244 Rugged, hard-working pure FB.
3. Joel Makovicka, Nebraska 5-10/235 Always gives you a solid day's work.
4. *Aaron Harris, Penn State 5-10/230 Outstanding running threat.
5. Jermaine Fazande, Oklahoma 5-11/260 Physically, he's what you are looking for.

TACKLES

1. Matt Stinchcomb, Georgia 6-6/320 Super blue-chipper who dominates.
2. Aaron Gibson, Wisconsin 6-6/390 Possesses incredible physical ability.
3. Grey Ruegamer, Arizona State 6-4/295 Has versatility to operate at any spot up front.
4. Jon Jansen, Michigan 6-6/300 Durable, steady performer.
5. Zach Piller, Florida 6-4/303 Does a good job handling quick, athletic DEs.
6. John Welbourn, California 6-4/290 Experienced pro-style pass blocker.
7. Ryan Young, Kansas State 6-5/333 It's a \$25 cab ride to get around this huge man.
8. *Chad Clifton, Tennessee 6-6/298 Quality athlete who possesses good upside.
9. Luke Petitgout, Notre Dame 6-5/291 Steady, hard-working player.
10. Ken Bowen, USC 6-7/325 Has the necessary size and experience.

GUARDS

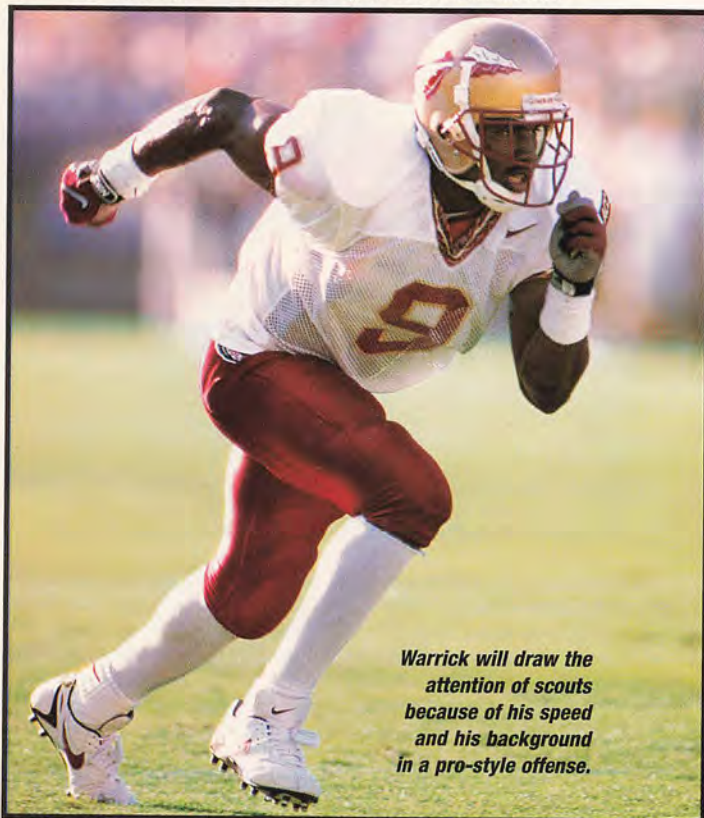
1. Mike Rosenthal, Notre Dame 6-6/315 Solid, experienced, reliable prospect.
2. Anthony Cesario, Colorado State 6-5/310 Really gets after DL in the WAC.
3. Joe Wong, BYU 6-5/322 Combines size and power with fairly quick feet.
4. Tony Coats, Washington 6-6/300 Makes the move inside from tackle.
5. Shawn Clark, Appalachian State 6-4/290 Could move up if he bounces back from injury.

CENTERS

1. Brian Uhl, Cincinnati 6-4/298 Hard-nosed anchor for the Bearcats.
2. Jamar Nesbit, South Carolina 6-4/308 Top drawer talent shifts inside from tackle.
3. Todd McClure, LSU 6-2/280 Veteran of the SEC wars.
4. Josh Heskew, Nebraska 6-2/291 Only starter returning up front for Huskers.
5. Jason Strayhorn, Michigan State 6-3/288 Physical skills are impressive.

WIDE RECEIVERS

1. *Peter Warrick, Florida State 5-11/189 One of the top offensive players in the country.
2. D'Wayne Bates, Northwestern 6-2/198 Has the size NFL clubs covet.
3. ^David Boston, Ohio State 6-2/205 Superior athlete with good hands.
4. Torry Holt, NC State 6-0/188 Catches everything thrown his way.
5. Dee Miller, Ohio State 6-0/190 Has potential to skyrocket up the charts.
6. Tai Streets, Michigan 6-3/188 Comes through big in the clutch.
7. Shawn Foreman, West Virginia 6-0/205 Main go-to threat for the Mountaineers.



Warrick will draw the attention of scouts because of his speed and his background in a pro-style offense.

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

8. Jermaine Copeland, Tennessee 6-1/209 Has the raw tools to star in the SEC.
9. Lenzie Jackson, Arizona State 5-11/189 Displays a keen understanding of the position.
10. Peerless Price, Tennessee 5-11/177 Can make the circus-type reception.
11. Kevin Johnson, Syracuse 5-11/189 Can flat out fly.
12. Everett Burnett, Kansas State 6-2/195 Has All-American potential.
13. Troy Edwards, Louisiana Tech 5-9/193 Can beat you in a lot of ways.
14. L.C. Stevens, North Carolina 6-4/210 Tough to stop in the red zone.
15. Billy Miller, USC 6-3/209 Can adjust easily to poorly thrown ball.
16. Troy Smith, East Carolina 6-3/181 Presents huge problems for shorter cover men.
17. Desmond Clark, Wake Forest 6-3/233 Can out-muscle cornerbacks for the football.
18. Craig Yeast, Kentucky 5-9/171 Diminutive, but talented.
19. Malcolm Johnson, Notre Dame 6-4/205 Has the necessary skills to make a move up the board.
20. Karsten Bailey, Auburn 5-11/198 Provides big-play potential.

TIGHT ENDS

1. Jerame Tuman, Michigan 6-3/245 Superior pass receiving TE.
2. ^Rufus French, Mississippi 6-4/245 A blue-chip talent, but blocking needs work.
3. John Lumpkin, Ohio State 6-7/263 Size alone gets your attention.
4. Larry Brown, Georgia 6-4/252 Underrated standout in talent-laden SEC.
5. Cunch Brown, Penn State 6-3/252 Has the physical skills.
6. Justin Swift, Kansas State 6-3/255 Sure-handed hook-zone option.
7. Derrick Spiller, Texas A&M 6-3/241 Can stretch the deep middle.
8. Mike Lucky, Arizona 6-5/257 Receiving skills need to match blocking acumen.
9. Michael Foushee, NC State 6-4/237 Hard worker who battles for 60 minutes.
10. Joe Kuykendall, Oregon State 6-5/255 Size and sure hands get your attention.

DEFENSE

ENDS

1. Tony Bryant, Florida State 6-3/277 The next in the long line of skilled Seminole edge pass rushers.
2. Mike Rucker, Nebraska 6-5/260 Hopes to pick up where Grant Wistrom left off.
3. Robert Daniel, Northwestern St. (La.) 6-5/263 Has the computer numbers the NFL is looking for.
4. Roosevelt Colvin, Purdue 6-2/255 Quick and explosive off the corner.
5. Montae Reagor, Texas Tech 6-2/257 Closes on the QB with an exceptional burst.
6. Chris Hood, Alabama 6-3/256 Productive and consistent from game to game.
7. Tim Beauchamp, Florida 6-2/259 Could move up the board with an eye-catching season.
8. Ebenezer Ekuban, North Carolina 6-4/273 Poised for outstanding senior campaign.
9. Roderick Coleman, East Carolina 6-2/258 Has a motor that never stops.
10. Dimitrios Underwood, Michigan State 6-6/260 Height and wingspan create problems for opposing quarterbacks.

INSIDE LINEBACKERS

1. ^Andy Katzenmoyer, Ohio State 6-4/255 Destructive MLB with intimidating capability.
2. *Brandon Short, Penn State 6-2/245 Speed and athletic ability make him a multi-dimensional performer.
3. Eric Barton, Maryland 6-2/239 You have to take notice of his skills and production.
4. Johnny Rutledge, Florida 6-2/237 Has talent to star at a true MLB spot.
5. Vernon Rollins, Iowa 6-2/243 Always in the center of the action.
6. Jay Foreman, Nebraska 6-0/240 Has a nose for the ball.
7. Sam Sword, Michigan 6-1/243 Solid, experienced player.
8. Dat Nguyen, Texas A&M 6-1/225 One of the more active defenders in the nation.
9. Matt Hughes, Iowa 6-2/241 Comes to play every week.
10. Parc Williams, Minnesota 6-2/238 Shows excellent diagnostic ability.

OUTSIDE LINEBACKERS

1. ^Chris Claiborne, USC 6-3/245 The Trojans' best LB prospect since Junior Seau.
2. Gary Stills, West Virginia 6-2/237 Spends most of his time in the opposition's backfield.
3. *Rahim Abdullah, Clemson 6-5/235 Gifted athlete with ability to take over games.
4. ^Jevon Kearse, Florida 6-4/239 Could be tremendous if he puts it all together.
5. Hannibal Navies, Colorado 6-3/244 Size-speed ratio puts him in elite class.
6. Travis Ochs, Kansas State 6-2/238 Well-coached, steady performer.
7. Keith Newman, North Carolina 6-3/237 Expected to be ringleader of new-look Tar Heels defense.
8. Lamont Green, Florida State 6-2/238 Does a good job working his way through interference.
9. John McLaughlin, California 6-3/244 Notre Dame transfer could develop into feared sack artist.
10. Tom Matijacic, Portland State 6-2/233 Runs in the 4.5 range and bench-presses 425 pounds.

CORNERBACKS

1. *Dre' Bly, North Carolina 5-9/181 Outstanding cover corner.
2. Antoine Winfield, Ohio State 5-9/183 One of the toughest pure CBs in years.
3. Daylon McCutcheon, USC 5-10/179 Blue-chipper since early in his college career.
4. ^Champ Bailey, Georgia 6-0/183 Versatile, high-profile performer who will also see action at WR.
5. Fred Vinson, Vanderbilt 5-11/188 Underrated standout in the SEC.
6. Chris McAlister, Arizona 6-1/188 Size and athleticism allow him to match up effectively against big receivers.
7. Tony George, Florida 5-10/95 Should earn high honors after moving from safety to CB.
8. *Ahmed Plummer, Ohio State 5-11/190 Combines with Winfield to give Buckeyes the top CB tandem in the nation.
9. Fernando Bryant, Alabama 6-0/175 Big-play defender with excellent ball skills.
10. Amp Campbell, Michigan State 5-11/185 Demonstrates a good feel for the position.

SAFETIES

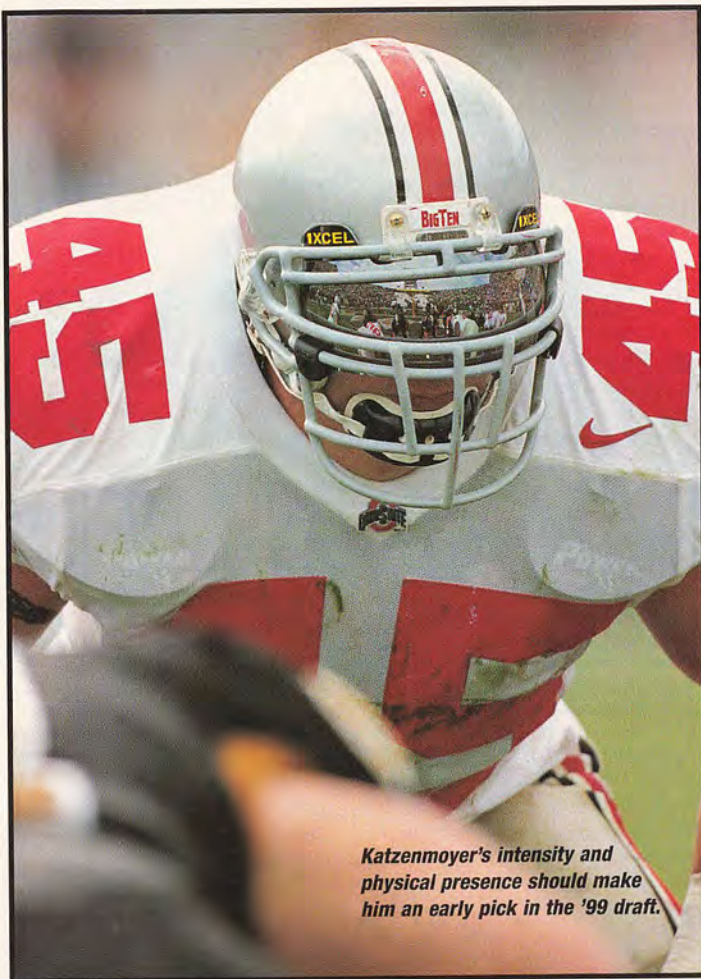
1. Anthony Poindexter, Virginia 6-0/202 One of top defensive players in the ACC.
2. Mitchell Freedman, Arizona State 5-11/205 Lights-out hitter with intimidating style.
3. Tinker Keck, Cincinnati 6-0/203 In the mold of former Bears standouts Gary Fencik and Doug Plank.
4. Damon Moore, Ohio State 5-11/205 Aggressive ballhawk with solid all-around ability.
5. Larry Atkins, UCLA 6-3/213 The next in the long line of outstanding Bruins safeties.
6. Pierson Prioleau, Virginia Tech 5-10/189 Amazing 41-inch vertical jump speaks volumes about athletic prowess.
7. Marcus Ray, Michigan 5-11/210 Tempo-setter in the Wolverines' secondary.
8. Antwan Edwards, Clemson 6-0/200 Strong, fast and versatile.
9. Marquis Smith, California 6-2/219 Rugged enforcer with 4.53 speed and superior athletic ability.
10. Nikia Codie, Baylor 6-3/197 Big-play performer with confident approach.

SPECIALISTS

1. Kris Brown (K), Nebraska 5-10/205 Combines 55-yard range with impressive accuracy.
2. Chris Sailer (K/P), UCLA 5-10/188 Multi-purpose standout.
3. Martin Gramatica (K), Kansas State 5-9/171 Has an NFL leg.
4. Rodney Williams (P), Georgia Tech 6-1/177 Can boom the Rambling Wreck out of trouble.
5. Brent Bartholomew (P), Ohio State 6-1/225 Averaged an impressive 45.2 yards per punt last season.

NOTE: The positions are projections as to where the player will play as a pro and not necessarily the position he plays in college. In addition, the heights and weights are *not* necessarily those listed by the college.

* Fourth-year junior (1995 high school graduate). ^ True junior or redshirt sophomore (1996 high school graduate).



Katzenmoyer's intensity and physical presence should make him an early pick in the '99 draft.

PAUL NISSELY / TSN

TACKLES

1. Jared DeVries, Iowa 6-4/280 Difference-maker up front for the Hawkeyes.
2. Ed Chester, Florida 6-3/283 Combines athleticism with power.
3. Gary Holmes, Washington State 6-6/315 Carries the underrated label.
4. Russell Davis, North Carolina 6-4/275 Does a great job locating the ball.
5. Albrey Battle, Arizona State 6-2/285 Cat-quick out of the blocks.
6. John Thornton, West Virginia 6-2/286 Creates a disturbance when the ball is snapped.
7. Andre Wray, NC State 6-5/260 This could be his year to dominate.
8. Anthony McFarland, LSU 6-0/290 Experienced fireplug from his nose tackle spot.
9. Jason Wiltz, Nebraska 6-3/310 Hard-working plugger on the inside.
10. Lamar King, Saginaw Valley (Mich.) 6-4/285 Sleeper worth keeping an eye on.

Grading the 1995 Draft

BY DAVE SLOAN

In 1994, Penn State had one of the most prolific offenses in college football history (47.8 ppg, 520.2 ypg). So it was no surprise when three key members of that prolific unit—running back Ki-Jana Carter, quarterback Kerry Collins and tight end Kyle Brady—were among the first nine players selected in the 1995 NFL draft.

Stardom was predicted for all three, but for a variety of reasons it hasn't happened. Carter (the No. 1 pick) has started just 13 of 31 games for Cincinnati, averaging 3.3 yards per rush. Collins (the No. 5 pick) made the Pro Bowl in 1996 but bottomed out last season, compiling a 55.7 quarterback rating for Carolina. And the Jets' Brady (the No. 9 pick) has just five career touchdown receptions despite playing all but one game in three seasons. The struggles of the Penn State trio proves once again just how hard it is to project a college player's performance in the NFL.

That said, we pass judgment on the 1995 draft below. We show how many picks a team had, how many of those picks were "premium" (first- and second-rounders) and how many players still are with the team that drafted them (through the '98 draft). We also give a brief comment and assign a letter grade for each team.

AFC EAST

Team	Total picks	Premium picks	Still with team
Buffalo	11	2	8
Indianapolis	7	2	5
Miami	7	2	0
New England	7	2	5
N.Y. Jets	8	3	3

BUFFALO—No. 1 G Ruben Brown has played in the past two Pro Bowls and is the best player on a weak line. No. 2 QB Todd Collins was drafted in the hopes of one day replacing Jim Kelly, but that day may never come. He was awful last season, forcing the Bills to acquire not one but two (Doug Flutie and Rob Johnson) quarterbacks in the offseason. Buffalo's other nine picks, six of whom remain, are mostly backup types who have done little to distinguish themselves. **GRADE: C-.**

INDIANAPOLIS—No. 1 DT Ellis Johnson, who became a starter last season after two years as a reserve, has been average. He also has been injury-prone, which has

slowed his development. No. 2 TE Ken Dilger arguably is one of the AFC's best at his position, but his numbers haven't been helped by the offense. After catching 42 passes in each of his first two seasons, he caught 27 last year. No. 3 FB Zack Crockett is a nice blocking back for Marshall Faulk. **GRADE: C.**

MIAMI—This was Don Shula's last draft, and the Dolphins have the ignominious distinction of being the only team without a player drafted three years ago still on their roster. No. 1 T Billy Milner was traded after only 20 games, and No. 2 G Andrew Greene did little before being released. No. 4 TE Pete Mitchell, now with Jacksonville, has started 23 of 48 career games. Only No. 5 DT Norman Hand lasted more than one season in Miami. **GRADE: F.**

NEW ENGLAND—No team had a better first four picks: No. 1 CB Ty Law, No. 2 LB Ted Johnson, No. 3 RB Curtis Martin and No. 3 CB Jimmy Hitchcock. Martin, now with the Jets, has played in two Pro Bowls, and the other three might some day.

Despite missing five games last season with injuries, Martin still rushed for 1,160 yards. Hitchcock is now with Minnesota. And No. 4 C Dave Wohlabaugh has started since he arrived in New England. **GRADE: A+.**

N.Y. JETS—No. 1 TE Kyle Brady hasn't been the impact player the Jets thought he would be. But he also has had to work with three starting quarterbacks and two coaches. No. 1 DE Hugh Douglas seemed to fade a bit last season after a good first two years and was traded to the Eagles during the offseason. No. 2 G Matt Dwyer is an average starter. The team's five other picks contributed little before being released. **GRADE: C.**



Brady is a starter, but he isn't a star.

AFC CENTRAL

Team	Total picks	Premium picks	Still with team
Baltimore*	6	1	2
Cincinnati	6	1	3
Jacksonville	10	4	5
Pittsburgh	10	2	7
Tennessee*	9	2	6

*Drafted when franchises were elsewhere.

BALTIMORE—No. 1 LB Craig Powell left Ohio State a year early to sit on an NFL bench; he was released by the Ravens in June 1997 without having started a game. No. 3 QB Eric Zeier has been alternately hot and cold. If the coaching staff were sold on him, it would not have flirted with Jim Kelly before trading for Jim Harbaugh. No. 3 DE Mike Frederick has been a solid performer, primarily on special teams. **GRADE: D.**

CINCINNATI—RB Ki-Jana Carter is in danger of going down as one of the biggest No. 1 overall busts in NFL history. He suffered a season-ending knee injury before his rookie

season and hasn't been the same since. Even if healthy, Carter might not be as good as '97 second-rounder Corey Dillon. No. 3 T Melvin Tuten was released after two seasons. No. 4 DB Sam Shade led the Bengals in tackles last season. No. 5 WR David Dunn won't displace Carl Pickens or Darnay Scott as a starting receiver but is a solid kick returner. **GRADE: C-.**

JACKSONVILLE—No. 1 T Tony Boselli may be the best offensive lineman in the NFL; he's certainly the best young one. No. 2 T Brian DeMarco has become a solid backup after starting as a rookie. No. 1 RB James Stewart hasn't distinguished himself as a feature back on a team starved for one. No. 4 QB Rob Johnson played little in three years as Mark Brunell's backup but returned first- and fourth-round picks in a trade with Buffalo in the offseason. Not a bad return for the 99th overall pick. **GRADE: B+.**

PITTSBURGH—No. 1 TE Mark Bruener

is more proficient as a blocker than as a receiver. It took No. 2 QB Kordell Stewart a while to earn the starting job, but it may be years before he relinquishes it. No. 3 G Brenden Stai, who missed five games last season with ankle injury, is one of the team's best linemen. Of the Steelers' other seven picks, those who remain are backups and special-teams types. **GRADE: B+.**

TENNESSEE—No. 1 QB Steve McNair is coming off his first year as a full-time starter. Considering some of the "help" he has gotten from teammates, he hasn't done poorly. No. 2 DT Anthony Cook has been average, at best. He started 16 games last year but had no sacks. No. 3 WR Chris Sanders has shown flashes of brilliance and should be better in 1998 with the arrival of Yancey Thigpen. After rushing for 947 yards as a rookie, No. 3 RB Rodney Thomas has become a quality backup to Pro Bowl running back Eddie George. **GRADE: B-.**

AFC WEST

Team	Total picks	Premium picks	Still with team
Denver	7	0	3
Kansas City	8	1	2
Oakland	7	2	4
San Diego	13	3	6
Seattle	6	2	4

DENVER—No. 6 RB Terrell Davis was the biggest draft heist in years. And if you're a Broncos fan, it's a good thing. None of the other six players (none before the fourth round) taken by Denver in 1995 has done much. Only No. 7 LB Steve Russ, who plays exclusively on special teams, has been a contributor. No. 7 WR Byron Chamberlain also remains on the roster. **GRADE: C+.**

KANSAS CITY—Many observers thought the Chiefs made a huge reach when they took Michigan underclassman Trezelle Jenkins with the 31st overall pick. The team admitted the mistake by cutting him early last season. No. 3 WR Tamarick Vanover, though average as a receiver, has been excellent on kick returns. Of the remaining six picks, only one—No. 6 C Tom Barnadt—still is on the roster, and he has been moved to defense. **GRADE: D.**

OAKLAND—No. 1 RB Napoleon Kaufman



Despite his size, the smallish Kaufman has become a big cog in Oakland's offense.

may be the NFL's most explosive sub-6-foot running back outside of Barry Sanders. He clearly has outperformed the two runners taken ahead of him in 1995, Ki-Jana Carter and Tyrone Wheatley. No. 2 C Barret Robbins has been OK, but nothing special. No. 3 RB Joe Aska has been adequate as an occasional fill-in for Kaufman. **GRADE: C.**

SAN DIEGO—No team had more picks (13), but the results haven't been there. No. 2 CB Terrance Shaw starts but is adequate at best. No. 2 RB Terrell Fletcher is too small to be an effective NFL running back; he has started one game in three years. No. 2 WR Jimmy Oliver was released after two injury-plagued seasons. No. 6 G Troy Sienkiewicz and No. 6 T Tony Berti started last season on a below-average line. **GRADE: D.**

SEATTLE—No. 1 WR Joey Galloway has played up to his draft status (No. 8 overall) with 196 receptions and 26 touchdowns. He might have even better numbers had he played with better quarterbacks. No. 2 TE Christian Fauria has been a disappointment, losing the starting job to a player (Carlester Crumpler) he was drafted to replace. No. 4 LB Jason Kyle missed all of last season with a shoulder injury after playing on special teams his first two years. **GRADE: C-.**

NFC EAST

Team	Total picks	Premium picks	Still with team
Arizona	9	1	2
Dallas	10	3	3
N.Y. Giants	9	2	5
Philadelphia	9	3	5
Washington	8	2	5

ARIZONA—With 196 receptions in three years, No. 2 WR Frank Sanders has become a solid complement to Pro Bowl receiver Rob Moore. No. 3 QB Stoney Case started one game last season and probably won't start another—at least not in Arizona, if Jake Plummer stays healthy. A trio of fifth-round washouts—DB Cedric Smith, C Lance Scott and DB Tito Paul—is a good example of why Buddy Ryan no longer coaches this team.

GRADE: C-.

DALLAS—Speaking of former coaches, this could have been the worst of Barry Switzer's four Cowboys drafts. With Curtis Martin and Terrell Davis still on the board, he took Sherman Williams, who seldom played behind Emmitt Smith and will get even less time (assuming he makes the team) following the arrival of Chris Warren. In addition, No. 2 TE Kendall Watkins never developed into a reliable receiving threat before being released (other teams have tried him as an offensive lineman), and No. 2 G Shane Hannah tore up his right knee before his first preseason game and never played in a regular-season game. We won't bother mentioning the other seven picks. **GRADE: F.**

N.Y. GIANTS—No. 1 RB Tyrone Wheatley has rarely shown the elusiveness he did at Michigan; once viewed as Rodney Hampton's likely successor, he's now just another guy. No. 2 T Scott Gragg has been an average starter the past two seasons. No. 3 DB Rodney Young and No. 4 G Rob Zatechka are backups. The Giants' best pick was their next-to-last one: No. 6 FB Charles Way, a future Pro Bowl player. **GRADE: C-.**

PHILADELPHIA—With 17½ sacks in 46 games, No. 1 DE Mike Mamula hasn't had the impact one would expect of a No. 7 overall pick. He didn't get his first sack last year until the season was half over. No. 2 CB Bobby Taylor has been good when healthy, but he missed 10 games last year with a groin injury and was dangled as trade bait in the offseason. No. 3 T Barrett Brooks has started for three seasons despite the team's best efforts to replace him. The Eagles' best pick was No. 3 WR Chris T. Jones, who missed most of last season with a knee injury but has been a nice complementary receiver when healthy. **GRADE: C.**

WASHINGTON—Like most of the Redskins' first-round picks this decade, WR Michael Westbrook has struggled, showing only glimpses of the explosiveness he did at Colorado. No. 2 C Cory Raymer has been a decent starter when healthy, but he has missed 33 of a possible 48 games with



"Bust" might be too strong, but Mamula hasn't performed like a No. 7 overall pick.

injuries. Two fifth-rounders—TE Jamie Asher and DE Rich Owens—have been effective starters. **GRADE: C.**

NFC CENTRAL

Team	Total picks	Premium picks	Still with team
Chicago	9	3	4
Detroit	8	1	6
Green Bay	10	1	7
Minnesota	9	4	5
Tampa Bay	8	3	3

CHICAGO—The jury still is out on No. 1 RB Rashaan Salaam, who hasn't come close to duplicating his 1,074-yard rookie season. He has had injuries—he started the first three games last season before breaking his right leg and tearing ankle ligaments—but toughness is a concern. With Edgar Bennett and Curtis Enis now in Chicago, Salaam likely will have to resurrect his career elsewhere. No. 2 DT Patrick Riley was a washout, and No. 2 P Todd Sauerbrun has been inconsistent. Of the final six picks, only two—No. 3 LB Sean Harris and No. 6 DE Carl Reeves—are still on the roster. **GRADE: D.**

DETROIT—No. 1 DL Luther Elliss has

started every NFL game he has played and gotten better every season. No. 3 TE David Sloan bounced back after missing all but four games in 1996 with a knee injury, but he rarely sees the ball in the Lions' offense. No. 5 LB Stephen Boyd is coming off a breakthrough season with 192 tackles, second-most in club history. No. 5 WR Kez McCorvey and No. 6 FB Cory Schlesinger are backups. **GRADE: B.**

GREEN BAY—No. 1 CB Craig Newsome was a starter his first two seasons before missing last season with a knee injury. No. 3 DT Darius Holland was a backup whose weaknesses were exposed in the Super Bowl; he was traded to the Chiefs in the offseason. The Packers' other three third-round picks in 1995 have been big contributors: FB William Henderson, LB Brian Williams and WR Antonio Freeman. No. 5 RB Travis Jervey made the Pro Bowl as a special teams player. No. 7 G Adam Timmerman is an effective starter. **GRADE: A.**

MINNESOTA—The Vikings had four picks in the first two rounds, but none has become a standout. No. 1 DE Derrick Alexander, No. 1 T Korey Stringer and No. 2 CBs Orlanda Thomas and Corey Fuller have been OK. No. 4 QB Chad May is with his third team (Cincinnati) in four years.

GRADE: C+.

TAMPA BAY—No. 1 DT Warren Sapp is the Bucs' best player since Lee Roy Selmon. He is coming off the first of what should be many Pro Bowl seasons. Fellow No. 1 LB Derrick Brooks also is a better-than-average NFL player. It's a good thing Sapp and Brooks have been so good; Tampa's other six picks have done little, although No. 2 DB Melvin Johnson has started at times. **GRADE: A-.**

NFC WEST

Team	Total picks	Premium picks	Still with team
Atlanta	6	2	3
Carolina	11	4	5
New Orleans	7	2	3
St. Louis	10	3	3
San Francisco	4	1	2

ATLANTA—No. 1 S Devin Bush has started at times, but No. 2 CB Ronald Davis, No. 3 LB Lorenzo Styles and No. 5 WR Roell Preston were washouts. No. 6 DT Travis Hall, who came on strong late last season, could turn out to be the best member of this draft class. **GRADE: D.**

CAROLINA—The Panthers thought they had their quarterback of the future when they selected Kerry Collins with the No. 5 pick. Collins still might fill that role, but he raised more questions than he answered in '97 and was on the trading block in the offseason. Fellow No. 1s Tyrone Poole (CB) and Blake Brockermeyer (T) also start, but neither has become a household name, even in Charlotte. No. 2 DE Shawn King has been a big disappointment, one of the reasons the team overpaid for Sean Gilbert. No. 4 C Frank Garcia has started 20 consecutive regular-season games. **GRADE: C+.**

NEW ORLEANS—After struggling his first two seasons, No. 1 LB Mark Fields came on strong last year, justifying his first-round status with eight sacks and more than 100 tackles. No. 2 FB Ray Zellers has been average, as has No. 3 T Mike Verstegen. None of the Saints' other four selections remain on the roster. **GRADE: C-.**

ST. LOUIS—No. 1 DE Kevin Carter has been OK (23 sacks in 48 starts), but he hasn't been someone offensive coordinators lose sleep over. No. 2 G Zach Wiegert is an average starter on a weak line, but at least he's still around; No. 2 G Jesse James, No. 3 K Steve McLaughlin and No. 4 WR/TE Lovell Pinkney are long gone. Of the last eight players the Rams picked, only No. 7 S Gerald McBurrows, primarily a special teamer, remains on the roster.

GRADE: D.

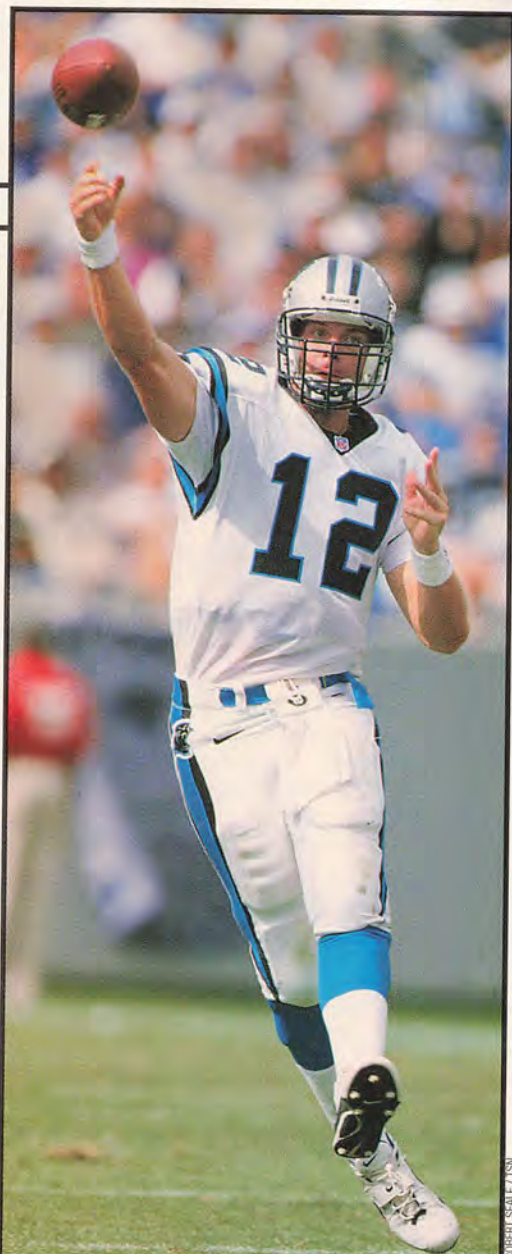
SAN FRANCISCO—With just four selections overall—the fewest of any team—the 49ers basically forfeited the rest of their draft to trade up for UCLA All-American WR JJ. Stokes. While Stokes did play better last season in the absence of Jerry Rice, he still hasn't shown the skills that had NFL scouts drooling three years ago. No. 4 TE Tim Hanshaw, since moved to guard, also remains.

GRADE: C-.

TSN

Dave Sloan is an associate editor for THE SPORTING NEWS.

Collins was superb in '96 but awful in '97. This could be a make-or-break season.



ROBERT SCALF/TSN

PRO FOOTBALL SURVEY



"YO, IT'S FLY. THE BOSS WANTS TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT PRO FOOTBALL AND THIS YEARBOOK. FLY'S TALKIN' ABOUT THE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE NFL MEN OF THE GRIDIRON FROM "THE BIBLE OF SPORTS." TELL THE SPORTING NEWS WHAT YOU THINK AND YOU GET A SHOT AT SOME GREAT STUFF."

All you have to do is answer the following questions and return this survey to the address on the next page by October 31, 1998, and you'll be entered in a drawing for a \$100 gift certificate for sports apparel from 1-800-PRO-TEAM - or one of 25 copies of The Sporting News ultimate trivia book, *"So, You Think You Know Sports"*.

"GET GOIN'. SEE YOU IN THE SPORTS PAGES."

1. A common assumption is that today's athletes are more concerned about their paychecks than their team's performance. If players were asked if they'd be willing to take a pay cut in exchange for a Super Bowl ring, what percentage of the players do you think would accept the pay cut? ☐ 10% ☐ 30% ☐ 50% ☐ 70% ☐ 90%
2. If you had your choice of any quarterback to start for your team in the Super Bowl, who would you pick? ☐ Troy Aikman ☐ Drew Bledsoe ☐ Mark Brunell ☐ John Elway ☐ Brett Favre ☐ Dan Marino ☐ Kordell Stewart ☐ Steve Young
3. Which player do you feel will be the most successful in the NFL? ☐ Peyton Manning ☐ Ryan Leaf ☐ Andre Wadsworth
- 3a. Which one do you think will be in the playoffs first? ☐ Peyton Manning ☐ Ryan Leaf ☐ Andre Wadsworth
4. Denver's victory over Green Bay marked the first win by an AFC team in the Super Bowl in 14 years. Does this signal a shift in the balance of power back to the AFC? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Which team has the best home-field advantage in the NFL? ☐ Green Bay ☐ Kansas City ☐ Denver ☐ Other _____
6. If you had to pick a decade when pro football was at its best, what would it be? ☐ '20s ☐ '30s ☐ '40s ☐ '50s ☐ '60s ☐ '70s ☐ '80s ☐ '90s
7. Would you like to see instant replay used even if it meant your team would be charged a timeout every time it requested a review, including when the call was overturned? ☐ Yes ☐ No
9. How would you rate the officiating in the NFL? ☐ very good ☐ above average ☐ fair ☐ below average ☐ poor
10. Do you follow college football as much as the NFL? ☐ Yes ☐ No
11. How much attention do you pay to the NFL draft? ☐ very interested ☐ passing interest ☐ not interested
12. Where do you get most of your pro football information? ☐ TV ☐ radio ☐ newspapers ☐ team-specific publications ☐ word of mouth
13. How many NFL games do you attend in a season? ☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-10 ☐ over 10
14. Is this your first purchase of The Sporting News Pro Football yearbook? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 14a. If not, how many times have you bought previously? ☐ 1 ☐ 2-3 ☐ 4-5 ☐ 5-10 ☐ over 10
15. Would you like to read more stories that analyze the finer points of the game on the field? ☐ Yes ☐ No
16. Would you like to see some coverage of the Arena Football League? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please turn the page

17. If we could devote more or less space to certain sections (without changing the overall number of pages), how would you like to see that space used?

More pages Fewer pages Perfect as is

____ Feature articles on players, issues, etc.
 ____ Team previews
 ____ Scouting the NFL, NFC and AFC
 ____ Predictions (divisional races, award winners, etc.)
 ____ Rosters and Stats

18. Have you ever watched a sporting event on pay-per-view?
☐ Yes ☐ No

19. Do you own a satellite dish?
☐ Yes (☐ C-Band ☐ DSS) ☐ No

20. With the ability to watch up to 13 NFL games every Sunday, would you be interested in purchasing a satellite system? ☐ Yes ☐ No

21. Ideally, when would you like to purchase The Sporting News Pro Football yearbook? ☐ July 1 ☐ July 15 ☐ August 1 ☐ August 15

22. Do you refer to The Sporting News Pro Football yearbook throughout the season? ☐ Yes ☐ No

22a. If yes, how often? ☐ weekly ☐ monthly ☐ constantly

23. How many other people read your copy of The Sporting News Pro Football yearbook?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4-5
☐ 6-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ more than 15

24. What factors influenced you to buy The Sporting News Pro Football yearbook? (Check all that apply.)

☐ overall editorial content
☐ graphic presentation ☐ cover
☐ price ☐ name recognition
☐ rosters ☐ stats

25. Which other yearbooks from The Sporting News do you read or look through? (Check all that apply.)

☐ College Football
☐ Fantasy Football
☐ Baseball ☐ Fantasy Baseball
☐ Pro Basketball ☐ Hockey
☐ College Basketball ☐ Racing

26. If it were possible to buy all nine of The Sporting News yearbooks on a subscription basis, would you do so? ☐ Yes ☐ No

27. Do you buy yearbooks from other companies? ☐ Yes ☐ No

27a. If yes, which ones? ☐ Athlon
☐ Lindy's ☐ Street & Smith's
☐ Preview ☐ Petersen's
☐ Other _____

28. Do you read The Sporting News weekly magazine? ☐ Yes ☐ No

28a. If yes, how would you rate the pro football coverage? ☐ excellent
☐ very good ☐ good ☐ average
☐ below average

29. Are you a subscriber to The Sporting News? ☐ Yes ☐ No

30. Do you play sports? ☐ Yes ☐ No

30a. If yes, what sports do you play?
☐ football ☐ golf
☐ baseball ☐ tennis
☐ softball ☐ running
☐ basketball ☐ cycling
☐ hockey ☐ hiking/walking
☐ soccer ☐ rollerblading
☐ other (s) _____

31. Have you ever purchased something through the mail? ☐ Yes ☐ No

32. Do you own a personal computer? ☐ Yes ☐ No

33. Do you currently subscribe to an on-line service? ☐ Yes ☐ No

34. Have you ever seen or used The Sporting News website (www.sportingnews.com)?
☐ Yes ☐ No

35. Do you play in a Rotisserie or other fantasy league? ☐ Yes ☐ No
☐ baseball ☐ football
☐ basketball ☐ hockey ☐ golf

36. Do you wear merchandise featuring your teams' logos?
☐ Yes ☐ No

37. How much do you spend a year on sporting goods (clothes and equipment)? ☐ under \$100
☐ \$100 to \$250 ☐ over \$250

38. Will you be buying a new car or truck in the next two years?
☐ Yes ☐ No

39. Do you consider brand names in your purchasing decisions?
☐ Yes ☐ No

40. Have you ever traveled to attend a pro football game outside your local market? ☐ Yes ☐ No

41. Please check the category that includes your age. ☐ Under 18
☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-29 ☐ 30-34 ☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54 ☐ 55-64 ☐ Over 64

42. Are you... ☐ male? ☐ female?

43. Are you... ☐ married? ☐ single?

44. Did you attend or graduate from college? ☐ Yes ☐ No

45. Which of the following categories contains your approximate total household income, before taxes, for 1997? (Please include total earnings for all members of your household from all sources.)
☐ Under \$20,000 ☐ \$20,000-\$29,999 ☐ \$30,000-\$39,999 ☐ \$40,000-\$49,999
☐ \$50,000-\$74,999 ☐ \$75,000-\$99,999 ☐ \$100,000-\$199,999 ☐ Over \$200,000

THIS PORTION IS FOR OUR RECORDS AND WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AND SEPARATE FROM YOUR SPORTS POLL ANSWERS. PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip Code _____

Please return the survey to:
The Sporting News
Pro Football Survey
P.O. Box 1040
Millburn, NJ 07041



1998 SCHEDULE

EXHIBITIONS

(All times are local, except †American Bowl games, which are Eastern)

WEEK 1

Friday, July 31

Seattle at Dallas8:00

Saturday, August 1

Pittsburgh vs. Tampa Bay at
Canton, Ohio*7:00

Green Bay vs. Kansas City
at Tokyo, Japan†10:15

*Hall of Fame Game.

Sunday, August 2

New England at San Francisco3:00

WEEK 2

Thursday, August 6

N.Y. Jets at Philadelphia8:00

Friday, August 7

Arizona at Detroit7:00

Tennessee at Atlanta7:30

Saturday, August 8

Buffalo at Pittsburgh7:30

Chicago at Baltimore7:30

Cincinnati at N.Y. Giants8:00

Denver at St. Louis7:00

Indianapolis at Seattle7:00

Jacksonville at Carolina7:30

Kansas City vs. Tampa Bay

at Norman, Okla.7:00

Miami at Washington7:30

New Orleans at Green Bay7:00

Oakland at Dallas8:00

San Francisco at San Diego7:00

Sunday, August 9

Minnesota at New England7:30

WEEK 3

Thursday, August 13

Tampa Bay at Miami8:20

Friday, August 14

Atlanta at Detroit7:00

Carolina at Buffalo7:30

Chicago at Arizona7:00

New Orleans at Denver7:00

N.Y. Giants at Jacksonville8:00

Pittsburgh at Philadelphia8:00

Saturday, August 15

San Francisco vs. Seattle at

Vancouver, B.C.†8:00

Baltimore at N.Y. Jets5:00

Kansas City at Minnesota7:00

St. Louis at San Diego8:00

Washington at Tennessee1:00

Sunday, August 16

Oakland at Green Bay3:00

Monday, August 17

Dallas vs. New England

at Mexico City†8:00

Indianapolis at Cincinnati7:30

WEEK 4

Thursday, August 20

N.Y. Giants at N.Y. Jets8:20

Friday, August 21

Buffalo at Chicago7:00

Saturday, August 22

Atlanta vs. Pittsburgh at

Morgantown, W.Va.6:00

Dallas at St. Louis7:00

Detroit at Cincinnati7:30

Jacksonville at Kansas City7:00

Minnesota at Carolina7:30

New England at Washington7:30

San Diego at Indianapolis7:00

Seattle at Arizona7:00

Tennessee at New Orleans7:00

Sunday, August 23

Miami at San Francisco1:00

Monday, August 24

Green Bay at Denver6:00

Philadelphia at Baltimore7:30

Tampa Bay at OaklandTBA

WEEK 5

Thursday, August 27

Dallas at Jacksonville8:00

Detroit at Indianapolis7:30

Friday, August 28

Baltimore at N.Y. Giants8:00

Cincinnati at Atlanta7:30

Green Bay at Miami7:00

N.Y. Jets at Chicago7:00

St. Louis at Kansas City7:00

San Diego at Minnesota7:00

San Francisco at Seattle7:00

Tampa Bay at New Orleans7:30

Washington at Buffalo7:00

Saturday, August 29

Arizona at Oakland1:00

Carolina at Pittsburgh8:20

Denver at Tennessee1:00

Philadelphia at New England8:00

REGULAR SEASON

(All times local)

WEEK 1

Sunday, September 6

Arizona at Dallas3:05

Atlanta at Carolina1:01

Buffalo at San Diego1:15

Detroit at Green Bay12:01

Jacksonville at Chicago12:01

Miami at Indianapolis3:15

New Orleans at St. Louis12:01

N.Y. Jets at San Francisco1:15

Pittsburgh at Baltimore1:01

Seattle at Philadelphia1:01

Tampa Bay at Minnesota12:01

Tennessee at Cincinnati1:01

Washington at N.Y. Giants1:01

Oakland at Kansas City7:20

Monday, September 7

New England at Denver6:20

WEEK 2

Sunday, September 13

Arizona at Seattle1:15

Baltimore at N.Y. Jets1:01

Buffalo at Miami1:01

Carolina at New Orleans12:01

Chicago at Pittsburgh1:01

Cincinnati at Detroit1:01

Dallas at Denver2:15

Kansas City at Jacksonville1:01

Minnesota at St. Louis12:01

N.Y. Giants at Oakland1:15

Philadelphia at Atlanta1:01

San Diego at Tennessee12:01

Tampa Bay at Green Bay12:01

Indianapolis at New England8:20

Monday, September 14

San Francisco at Washington8:20

WEEK 3

Sunday, September 20

Baltimore at Jacksonville4:15

Chicago at Tampa Bay4:05

Denver at Oakland1:15

Detroit at Minnesota12:01

Green Bay at Cincinnati1:01

Indianapolis at N.Y. Jets1:01

Pittsburgh at Miami1:01

St. Louis at Buffalo1:01

San Diego at Kansas City12:01

Tennessee at New England1:01

Washington at Seattle1:05

Philadelphia at Arizona5:20

Monday, September 21

Dallas at N.Y. Giants8:20
(Open date: Atlanta, Carolina, New Orleans,
San Francisco.)

WEEK 4

Sunday, September 27

Arizona at St. Louis12:01

Atlanta at San Francisco1:15

Denver at Washington1:01

Green Bay at Carolina1:01

Jacksonville at Tennessee12:01

Kansas City at Philadelphia1:01

Minnesota at Chicago3:15

New Orleans at Indianapolis12:01

N.Y. Giants at San Diego1:15

Oakland at Dallas12:01

Seattle at Pittsburgh4:05

Cincinnati at Baltimore8:20

Monday, September 28

Tampa Bay at Detroit8:20
(Open date: Buffalo, Miami, New England,
N.Y. Jets.)

WEEK 5

Sunday, October 4

Carolina at Atlanta1:01

Dallas at Washington1:01

Detroit at Chicago12:01

Miami at N.Y. Jets1:01

New England at New Orleans12:01

N.Y. Giants at Tampa Bay4:15

Oakland at Arizona1:05

Philadelphia at Denver2:15

San Diego at Indianapolis12:01

San Francisco at Buffalo1:01

Seattle at Kansas City7:20

Monday, October 5

Minnesota at Green Bay7:20
(Open date: Baltimore, Cincinnati,
Jacksonville, Pittsburgh, St. Louis,
Tennessee.)

WEEK 6

Sunday, October 11

Buffalo at Indianapolis12:01

Carolina at Dallas12:01

Chicago at Arizona1:05

Denver at Seattle1:15

Kansas City at New England1:01

N.Y. Jets at St. Louis3:15

Pittsburgh at Cincinnati1:01

San Diego at Oakland1:15

San Francisco at New Orleans12:01

Tennessee at Baltimore1:01

Washington at Philadelphia1:01

Atlanta at N.Y. Giants8:20

Monday, October 12Miami at Jacksonville8:20
(Open date: Detroit, Green Bay, Minnesota, Tampa Bay.)**WEEK 7****Thursday, October 15**

Green Bay at Detroit8:20

Sunday, October 18Arizona at N.Y. Giants1:01
Baltimore at Pittsburgh1:01
Carolina at Tampa Bay1:01
Cincinnati at Tennessee12:01
Dallas at Chicago3:15
Indianapolis at San Francisco1:05
Jacksonville at Buffalo1:01
New Orleans at Atlanta1:01
Philadelphia at San Diego1:15
St. Louis at Miami4:15
Washington at Minnesota12:01**Monday, October 19**N.Y. Jets at New England8:20
(Open date: Denver, Kansas City, Oakland, Seattle.)**WEEK 8****Sunday, October 25**Atlanta at N.Y. Jets1:01
Baltimore at Green Bay12:01
Chicago at Tennessee3:05
Cincinnati at Oakland1:15
Jacksonville at Denver2:15
Minnesota at Detroit1:01
New England at Miami1:01
San Francisco at St. Louis12:01
Seattle at San Diego1:15
Tampa Bay at New Orleans12:01
Buffalo at Carolina8:20**Monday, October 26**Pittsburgh at Kansas City7:20
(Open date: Arizona, Dallas, Indianapolis, N.Y. Giants, Philadelphia, Washington.)**WEEK 9****Sunday, November 1**Arizona at Detroit1:01
Denver at Cincinnati1:01
Jacksonville at Baltimore1:01
Miami at Buffalo1:01
Minnesota at Tampa Bay1:01
New England at Indianapolis1:01
New Orleans at Carolina1:01
N.Y. Giants at Washington1:01
N.Y. Jets at Kansas City3:05
St. Louis at Atlanta1:01
San Francisco at Green Bay3:15
Tennessee at Pittsburgh1:01

Oakland at Seattle5:20

Monday, November 2Dallas at Philadelphia8:20
(Open date: Chicago, San Diego.)**WEEK 10****Sunday, November 8**Atlanta at New England1:01
Buffalo at N.Y. Jets4:15
Carolina at San Francisco1:05
Cincinnati at Jacksonville1:01
Detroit at Philadelphia1:01
Indianapolis at Miami1:01
Kansas City at Seattle1:15
New Orleans at Minnesota12:01
N.Y. Giants at Dallas12:01
Oakland at Baltimore1:01
St. Louis at Chicago12:01
San Diego at Denver2:15
Washington at Arizona2:05
Tennessee at Tampa Bay8:20**Monday, November 9**

Green Bay at Pittsburgh8:20

WEEK 11**Sunday, November 15**Baltimore at San Diego1:05
Cincinnati at Minnesota12:01
Dallas at Arizona2:15
Green Bay at N.Y. Giants4:15
Miami at Carolina1:01
New England at Buffalo1:01
N.Y. Jets at Indianapolis1:01
Philadelphia at Washington1:01
Pittsburgh at Tennessee12:01
St. Louis at New Orleans12:01
San Francisco at Atlanta1:01
Seattle at Oakland1:05
Tampa Bay at Jacksonville4:15
Chicago at Detroit8:20**Monday, November 16**

Denver at Kansas City7:20

WEEK 12**Sunday, November 22**Arizona at Washington1:01
Baltimore at Cincinnati4:15
Carolina at St. Louis3:05
Chicago at Atlanta1:01
Detroit at Tampa Bay1:01
Green Bay at Minnesota12:01
Indianapolis at Buffalo1:01
Jacksonville at Pittsburgh1:01
Kansas City at San Diego1:15
N.Y. Jets at Tennessee3:15
Oakland at Denver2:15
Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants1:01
Seattle at Dallas12:01

New Orleans at San Francisco5:20

Monday, November 23

Miami at New England8:20

WEEK 13**Thursday, November 26**Minnesota at Dallas3:05
Pittsburgh at Detroit12:35**Sunday, November 29**Arizona at Kansas City12:01
Atlanta at St. Louis12:01
Buffalo at New England4:05
Carolina at N.Y. Jets1:01
Indianapolis at Baltimore1:01
Jacksonville at Cincinnati1:01
New Orleans at Miami1:01
Philadelphia at Green Bay3:15
Tampa Bay at Chicago12:01
Tennessee at Seattle1:05
Washington at Oakland1:15
Denver at San Diego5:20**Monday, November 30**

N.Y. Giants at San Francisco5:20

WEEK 14**Thursday, December 3**

St. Louis at Philadelphia8:20

Sunday, December 6Baltimore at Tennessee3:15
Buffalo at Cincinnati1:01
Dallas at New Orleans12:01
Detroit at Jacksonville1:01
Indianapolis at Atlanta1:01
Kansas City at Denver2:15
Miami at Oakland1:15
New England at Pittsburgh1:01
N.Y. Giants at Arizona2:05
San Diego at Washington1:01
San Francisco at Carolina1:01
Seattle at N.Y. Jets1:01
Chicago at Minnesota7:20**Monday, December 7**

Green Bay at Tampa Bay8:20

WEEK 15**Sunday, December 13**Arizona at Philadelphia1:01
Atlanta at New Orleans12:01
Chicago at Green Bay12:01
Cincinnati at Indianapolis1:01
Dallas at Kansas City3:15
Denver at N.Y. Giants1:01
Minnesota at Baltimore4:15
New England at St. Louis12:01
Oakland at Buffalo1:01
Pittsburgh at Tampa Bay1:01
San Diego at Seattle1:05

Tennessee at Jacksonville1:01

Washington at Carolina1:01

N.Y. Jets at Miami8:20

Monday, December 14

Detroit at San Francisco5:20

WEEK 16**Saturday, December 19**N.Y. Jets at Buffalo12:35
Tampa Bay at Washington4:05**Sunday, December 20**Atlanta at Detroit1:01
Baltimore at Chicago12:01
Cincinnati at Pittsburgh1:01
Indianapolis at Seattle1:05
Kansas City at N.Y. Giants1:01
New Orleans at Arizona2:15
Oakland at San Diego1:05
Philadelphia at Dallas3:15
St. Louis at Carolina1:01
San Francisco at New England1:01
Tennessee at Green Bay12:01
Jacksonville at Minnesota7:20**Monday, December 21**

Denver at Miami8:20

WEEK 17**Saturday, December 26**Kansas City at Oakland1:05
Minnesota at Tennessee11:35**Sunday, December 27**Buffalo at New Orleans12:01
Carolina at Indianapolis1:01
Detroit at Baltimore1:01
Green Bay at Chicago12:01
Miami at Atlanta1:01
New England at N.Y. Jets1:01
N.Y. Giants at Philadelphia4:05
St. Louis at San Francisco1:05
San Diego at Arizona2:15
Seattle at Denver2:15
Tampa Bay at Cincinnati1:01
Washington at Dallas7:20**Monday, December 28**

Pittsburgh at Jacksonville8:20

POSTSEASON**Wild cards:** January 2 and 3
(ABC, CBS, Fox).**Divisional playoffs:**
January 9 and 10 (CBS, Fox).**Conference finals:** January
17 (CBS, Fox).**Super Bowl:** January 31 in
Miami (Fox).**Pro Bowl:** February 7 in
Honolulu (ABC).

1997 FINAL STANDINGS

PLAYOFFS

AFC

EASTERN DIVISION

	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.
New England*	10	6	0	.625	369	289
Miami†	9	7	0	.563	339	327
N.Y. Jets	9	7	0	.563	348	287
Buffalo	6	10	0	.375	255	367
Indianapolis	3	13	0	.188	313	401

CENTRAL DIVISION

	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.
Pittsburgh*	11	5	0	.688	372	307
Jacksonville†	11	5	0	.688	394	318
Tennessee	8	8	0	.500	333	310
Cincinnati	7	9	0	.438	355	405
Baltimore	6	9	1	.406	326	345

WESTERN DIVISION

	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.
Kansas City*	13	3	0	.813	375	232
Denver†	12	4	0	.750	472	287
Seattle	8	8	0	.500	365	362
Oakland	4	12	0	.250	324	419
San Diego	4	12	0	.250	266	425

*Division champion. †Wild-card team.

NFC

EASTERN DIVISION

	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.
N.Y. Giants*	10	5	1	.656	307	265
Washington	8	7	1	.531	327	289
Philadelphia	6	9	1	.406	317	372
Dallas	6	10	0	.375	304	314
Arizona	4	12	0	.250	283	379

CENTRAL DIVISION

	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.
Green Bay*	13	3	0	.813	422	282
Tampa Bay†	10	6	0	.625	299	263
Detroit†	9	7	0	.563	379	306
Minnesota†	9	7	0	.563	354	359
Chicago	4	12	0	.250	263	421

WESTERN DIVISION

	W	L	T	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.
San Francisco*	13	3	0	.813	375	265
Carolina	7	9	0	.438	265	314
Atlanta	7	9	0	.438	320	361
New Orleans	6	10	0	.375	237	327
St. Louis	5	11	0	.313	299	359

*Division champion. †Wild-card team.

WILD-CARD GAMES

AFC

Denver 42, Jacksonville 17
New England 17, Miami 3

NFC

Minnesota 23, N.Y. Giants 22
Tampa Bay 20, Detroit 10

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

AFC

Pittsburgh 7, New England 6
Denver 14, Kansas City 10

NFC

San Francisco 38, Minnesota 22
Green Bay 21, Tampa Bay 7

CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIPS

AFC

Denver 24, Pittsburgh 21

NFC

Green Bay 23, San Francisco 10

SUPER BOWL

at Qualcomm Stadium, San Diego
Denver 31, Green Bay 24

1997 AFC STATISTICAL LEADERS

PASSING

Player, Team	Att.	Comp.	Pct. Comp.	Avg. Yds.	Pct. Gain	TD	Pct. TD	Yds. Long	Int.	Int.	Sack	Lost	Pts.
Brunell, Mark, Jac.	435	264	60.7	3281	7.54	18	4.1	75	7	1.6	33	189	91.2
George, Jeff, Oak.	521	290	55.7	3917	7.52	29	5.6	76	9	1.7	58	430	91.2
Bledsoe, Drew, N.E.	522	314	60.2	3706	7.10	28	5.4	76	15	2.9	30	258	87.7
Elway, John, Den.	502	280	55.8	3635	7.24	27	5.4	78	11	2.2	34	203	87.5
Harbaugh, Jim, Ind.	309	189	61.2	2060	6.67	10	3.2	58	4	1.3	41	256	86.2
Moon, Warren, Sea.	528	313	59.3	3678	6.97	25	4.7	160	16	3.0	30	192	83.7
Marino, Dan, Mia.	548	319	58.2	3780	6.90	16	2.9	55	11	2.0	20	132	80.7
O'Donnell, Neil, NYJ	460	259	56.3	2796	6.08	17	3.7	70	7	1.5	45	289	80.3
Grbac, Elvis, K.C.	314	179	57.0	1943	6.19	11	3.5	155	6	1.9	19	150	79.1
Blake, Jeff, Cin.	317	184	58.0	2125	6.70	8	2.5	150	7	2.2	39	244	77.6
Testaverde, Vinny, Balt.	470	271	57.7	2971	6.32	18	3.8	154	15	3.2	20	129	75.9
Stewart, Kordell, Pit.	440	236	53.6	3020	6.86	21	4.8	169	17	3.9	20	152	75.2
Humphries, Stan, S.D.	225	121	53.8	1488	6.61	5	2.2	172	6	2.7	18	144	70.8
McNair, Steve, Tenn.	415	216	52.0	2665	6.42	14	3.4	155	13	3.1	31	190	70.4
Collins, Todd, Buf.	391	215	55.0	2367	6.05	12	3.1	177	13	3.3	39	278	69.5

PUNTING

Player, Team	Net Punts	Yards	Long	Avg.	Total Punts	TB	Bik.	Opp. Ret.	Yds.	In 20	Net Avg.
Tupa, Tom, N.E.	78	3569	73	45.8	79	14	1	38	437	24	36.1
Gardocki, Chris, Ind.	67	3034	72	45.3	67	6	0	43	491	18	36.2
Araguz, Leo, Oak.	93	4189	63	45.0	93	6	0	52	431	28	39.1
Barker, Bryan, Jac.	66	2964	64	44.9	66	8	0	29	241	27	38.8
Bennett, Darren, S.D.	89	3972	66	44.6	90	8	1	39	416	26	37.7
Rouen, Tom, Den.	60	2598	57	43.3	60	4	0	26	235	22	38.1
Hansen, Brian, NYJ	71	3068	58	43.2	72	5	1	45	429	20	35.3
Kidd, John, Mia.	52	2247	58	43.2	52	4	0	35	243	13	37.0
Johnson, Lee, Cin.	81	3471	66	42.9	81	8	0	35	407	27	35.9
Montgomery, Greg, Balt.	83	3540	60	42.7	83	2	0	53	460	24	36.6
Miller, Josh, Pit.	64	2729	72	42.6	64	11	0	23	271	17	35.0
Aguiar, Louie, K.C.	82	3465	65	42.3	82	4	0	39	255	28	38.2
Mohr, Chris, Buf.	90	3764	59	41.8	91	6	1	44	366	24	36.0
Roby, Reggie, Tenn.	73	3049	59	41.8	73	1	0	36	430	25	35.6
Tuten, Rick, Sea.	48	2007	65	41.8	48	5	0	23	161	15	36.4

SCORING

Kickers

Player, Team	XP Made	XP Att.	FG Made	Misc. Att.	Tot. Pts.
Hollis, Mike, Jac.	41	41	31	36	134
Elam, Jason, Den.	46	46	26	36	124
Hall, John, NYJ	36	36	28	41	120
Blanchard, Cary, Ind.	21	21	32	41	117
Mare, Olindo, Mia.	33	33	28	36	117
Vinatieri, Adam, N.E.	40	40	25	29	115
Del Greco, Al, Tenn.	32	32	27	35	113
Stoyanovich, Pete, K.C.	35	36	26	27	113
Stover, Matt, Balt.	32	32	26	34	110
Davis, Greg, Min.-S.D.	31	32	26	34	109
Johnson, Norm, Pit.	40	40	22	25	106
Peterson, Todd, Sea.	37	37	22	28	103
Christie, Steve, Buf.	21	21	24	30	93
Pelfrey, Doug, Cin.	41	43	12	16	77
Ford, Cole, Oak.	33	35	13	22	72
Carney, John, S.D.	5	5	7	7	26
Bentley, Scott, Den.	4	4	2	3	10

Non-kickers (20 or more points)

Abdul-Jabbar, K., Mia.	16	15	1	0	0	96
Davis, Terrell, Den.	15	15	0	0	3	96
Galloway, Joey, Sea.	12	0	12	0	0	72
Jett, James, Oak.	12	0	12	0	0	72
Smith, Rod, Den.	12	0	12	0	0	72
Allen, Marcus, K.C.	11	11	0	0	0	66
Stewart, Kordell, Pit.	11	11	0	0	0	66
Dillon, Corey, Cin.	10	10	0	0	0	60
Alexander, Derrick, Balt.	9	0	9	0	0	54
Bettis, Jerome, Pit.	9	7	2	0	0	54
Means, Natrone, Jac.	9	9	0	0	0	54
Stewart, James, Jac.	9	8	1	0	0	54
Coates, Ben, N.E.	8	0	8	0	0	48
Faulk, Marshall, Ind.	8	7	1	0	0	48
Kaufman, Napoleon, Oak.	8	6	2	0	0	48
Lewis, Jermaine, Balt.	8	0	6	2	0	48
McCaffrey, Ed, Den.	8	0	8	0	0	48

McNair, Steve, Tenn.	8	8	0	0	0	48
Smith, Antowain, Buf.	8	8	0	0	0	48
George, Eddie, Tenn.	7	6	1	0	1	44
Thigpen, Yancey, Pit.	7	0	7	0	1	44
Carter, Ki-Jana, Cin.	7	7	0	0	0	42
Dudley, Rickey, Oak.	7	0	7	0	0	42
Murrell, Adrian, NYJ	7	7	0	0	0	42
Rison, Andre, K.C.	7	0	7	0	0	42
Harrison, Marvin, Ind.	6	0	6	0	2	40
McGee, Tony, Cin.	6	0	6	0	1	38
Broussard, Steve, Sea.	6	5	1	0	0	36
Brown, Troy, N.E.	6	0	6	0	0	36
Bruener, Mark, Pit.	6	0	6	0	0	36
Martin, Tony, S.D.	6	0	6	0	0	36
McKnight, James, Sea.	6	0	6	0	0	36
Brown, Tim, Oak.	5	0	5	0	1	32
Williams, Harvey, Oak.	5	3	2	0	1	32
Early, Quinn, Buf.	5	0	5	0	0	30
Green, Eric, Balt.	5	0	5	0	0	30
Johnson, Keyshawn, NYJ	5	0	5	0	0	30
Martin, Curtis, N.E.	5	4	1	0	0	30
McCardell, Keenan, Jac.	5	0	5	0	0	30
Metcalf, Eric, S.D.	5	0	2	3	0	30
Pickens, Carl, Cin.	5	0	5	0	0	30
Reed, Andre, Buf.	5	0	5	0	0	30
Scott, Darnay, Cin.	5	0	5	0	0	30
Jackson, Michael, Balt.	4	0	4	0	1	26
Wycheck, Frank, Tenn.	4	0	4	0	1	26
Brown, Gary, S.D.	4	4	0	0	0	24
Davis, Willie, Tenn.	4	0	4	0	0	24
Drayton, Troy, Mia.	4	0	4	0	0	24
Gordon, Darrien, Den.	4	0	0	4	0	24
Johnson, Leon, NYJ	4	2	0	2	0	24
Mitchell, Pete, Jac.	4	0	4	0	0	24
Morris, Bam, Balt.	4	4	0	0	0	24
Smith, Jimmy, Jac.	4	0	4	0	0	24
Warren, Chris, Sea.	4	4	0	0	0	24
Sharpe, Shannon, Den.	3	0	3	0	1	20

RUSHING (100 or more yards)

Player, Team	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
Davis, Terrell, Den.	369	1750	4.7	150	15
Bettis, Jerome, Pit.	375	1665	4.4	34	7
George, Eddie, Tenn.	357	1399	3.9	30	6
Kaufman, Napoleon, Oak.	272	1294	4.8	183	6
Martin, Curtis, N.E.	274	1160	4.2	170	4
Dillon, Corey, Cin.	233	1129	4.8	171	10
Murrell, Adrian, NYJ	300	1086	3.6	143	7
Faulk, Marshall, Ind.	264	1054	4.0	45	7
Brown, Gary, S.D.	253	945	3.7	32	4
Abdul-Jabbar, Karim, Mia.	283	892	3.2	22	15
Warren, Chris, Sea.	200	847	4.2	136	4
Smith, Antowain, Buf.	194	840	4.3	156	8
Means, Natrone, Jac.	244	823	3.4	20	9
Morris, Bam, Balt.	204	774	3.8	25	4
Phillips, Lawrence, St.L.-Mia.	201	677	3.4	28	8
McNair, Steve, Tenn.	101	674	6.7	47	8
Thomas, Thurman, Buf.	154	643	4.2	24	1
Stewart, James, Jac.	136	555	4.1	33	8
Hill, Greg, K.C.	157	550	3.5	38	0
Allen, Marcus, K.C.	124	505	4.1	30	11
Stewart, Kordell, Pit.	88	476	5.4	174	11
Carter, Ki-Jana, Cin.	128	464	3.6	179	7
Broussard, Steve, Sea.	70	418	6.0	177	5
Anders, Kimble, K.C.	79	397	5.0	43	0
Smith, Lamar, Sea.	91	392	4.3	35	2
Bennett, Donnell, K.C.	94	369	3.9	14	1
Byner, Earnest, Balt.	84	313	3.7	19	0
Thomas, Rodney, Tenn.	67	310	4.6	125	3
Crockett, Zack, Ind.	95	300	3.2	20	1
Graham, Jay, Balt.	81	299	3.7	19	2
Brunell, Mark, Jac.	48	257	5.4	15	2
Jones, George, Pit.	72	235	3.3	32	1
Blake, Jeff, Cin.	45	234	5.2	16	3
Hebron, Vaughn, Den.	49	222	4.5	46	1
Elway, John, Den.	50	218	4.4	23	1
Harbaugh, Jim, Ind.	36	206	5.7	18	0
Spikes, Irving, Mia.	63	180	2.9	14	2

Grbac, Elvis, K.C.	30	168	5.6	20	1
Fletcher, Terrell, S.D.	51	161	3.2	13	0
Johnson, Leon, NYJ	48	158	3.3	20	2
McPhail, Jerris, Mia.	17	146	8.6	171	1
Testaverde, Vinny, Balt.	34	138	4.1	16	0
Loville, Derek, Den.	25	124	5.0	17	1
Hall, Tim, Oak.	23	120	5.2	15	0
Gannon, Rich, K.C.	33	109	3.3	13	2
Holmes, Darick, Buf.	22	106	4.8	19	2
Cullors, Derrick, N.E.	22	101	4.6	24	0

PUNT RETURNS

Player, Team	No.	FC	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
Lewis, Jermaine, Balt.	28	13	437	15.6	189	2
Gordon, Darrien, Den.	40	22	543	13.6	194	3
Johnson, Leon, NYJ	51	6	619	12.1	166	1
Barlow, Reggie, Jac.	36	16	412	11.4	52	0
Metcalf, Eric, S.D.	45	8	489	10.9	185	3
Vanover, Tamarick, K.C.	35	14	383	10.9	182	1
Jordan, Charles, Mia.	26	15	273	10.5	38	0
Meggett, David, N.E.	45	8	467	10.4	47	0
Burris, Jeff, Buf.	21	8	198	9.4	32	0
Howard, Desmond, Oak.	27	20	210	7.8	31	0
Myers, Greg, Cin.	26	19	201	7.7	18	0
Harris, Ronnie, Sea.	21	12	144	6.9	19	0
Blackwell, Will, Pit.	23	6	149	6.5	15	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Player, Team	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
Glenn, Aaron, NYJ	28	741	26.5	196	1
Vanover, Tamarick, K.C.	51	1308	25.6	194	1
Meggett, David, N.E.	33	816	24.7	61	0
Blackwell, Will, Pit.	32	791	24.7	197	1
Hebron, Vaughn, Den.	43	1009	23.5	46	0
Spikes, Irving, Mia.	24	565	23.5	48	0
Bieniemy, Eric, Cin.	34	789	23.2	1102	1
Lewis, Jermaine, Balt.	41	905	22.1	51	0
Bailey, Aaron, Ind.	55	1206	21.9	61	0
Howard, Desmond, Oak.	61	1318	21.6	45	0
Broussard, Steve, Sea.	50	1076	21.5	43	0
Moulds, Eric, Buf.	43	921	21.4	53	0
Bynum, Kenny, S.D.	38	814	21.4	57	0
Mason, Derrick, Tenn.	26	551	21.2	54	0
Jackson, Willie, Jac.	32	653	20.4	38	0
Coleman, Andre, Sea.-Pit.	27	552	20.4	29	0
Holmes, Darick, Buf.	23	430	18.7	36	0

RECEIVING (25 or more receptions)

Player, Team	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
Brown, Tim, Oak.	104	1408	13.5	159	5
McCardell, Keenan, Jac.	85	1164	13.7	60	5
Smith, Jimmy, Jac.	82	1324	16.1	75	4
Thigpen, Yancey, Pit.	79	1398	17.7	169	7
McDuffie, O.J., Mia.	76	943	12.4	55	1
Harrison, Marvin, Ind.	73	866	11.9	44	6
Sharpe, Shannon, Den.	72	1107	15.4	168	3
Rison, Andre, K.C.	72	1092	15.2	45	7
Galloway, Joey, Sea.	72	1049	14.6	153	12
Smith, Rod, Den.	70	1180	16.9	78	12
Johnson, Keyshawn, NYJ	70	963	13.8	39	5
Jackson, Michael, Balt.	69	918	13.3	154	4
Dawkins, Sean, Ind.	68	804	11.8	51	2
Coates, Ben, N.E.	66	737	11.2	35	8
Alexander, Derrick, Balt.	65	1009	15.5	92	9
Green, Eric, Balt.	65	601	9.2	137	5
Pritchard, Mike, Sea.	64	843	13.2	61	2
Martin, Tony, S.D.	63	904	14.3	172	6
Wycheck, Frank, Tenn.	63	748	11.9	42	4
Reed, Andre, Buf.	60	880	14.7	177	5
Early, Quinn, Buf.	60	853	14.2	45	5
Anders, Kimble, K.C.	59	453	7.7	155	2
Chrebet, Wayne, NYJ	58	799	13.8	70	3
Jefferson, Shawn, N.E.	54	841	15.6	76	2
Scott, Darnay, Cin.	54	797	14.8	177	5
Pickens, Carl, Cin.	52	695	13.4	150	5
Dudley, Rickey, Oak.	48	787	16.4	76	7
Faulk, Marshall, Ind.	47	471	10.0	58	1
Jett, James, Oak.	46	804	17.5	156	12

Johnson, Charles, Pit.	46	568	12.3	49	2
McCaffrey, Ed, Den.	45	590	13.1	35	8
Hawkins, Courtney, Pit.	45	555	12.3	144	3
Warren, Chris, Sea.	45	257	5.7	20	0
Davis, Willie, Tenn.	43	564	13.1	46	4
Lewis, Jermaine, Balt.	42	648	15.4	142	6
Graham, Jeff, NYJ	42	542	12.9	147	2
Davis, Terrell, Den.	42	287	6.8	25	0
Brown, Troy, N.E.	41	607	14.8	67	6
Jones, Freddie, S.D.	41	505	12.3	62	2
Johnson, Lonnie, Buf.	41	340	8.3	162	2
Stewart, James, Jac.	41	336	8.2	40	1
Martin, Curtis, N.E.	41	296	7.2	22	1
Metcalf, Eric, S.D.	40	576	14.4	62	2
Kaufman, Napoleon, Oak.	40	403	10.1	170	2
Drayton, Troy, Mia.	39	558	14.3	130	4
Fletcher, Terrell, S.D.	39	292	7.5	25	0
Mitchell, Pete, Jac.	35	380	10.9	33	4
Popson, Ted, K.C.	35	320	9.1	21	2
McKnight, James, Sea.	34	637	18.7	160	6
McGee, Tony, Cin.	34	414	12.2	37	6
McPhail, Jerris, Mia.	34	262	7.7	19	1
Gonzalez, Tony, K.C.	33	368	11.2	30	2
Jones, Charlie, S.D.	32	423	13.2	144	1
Sanders, Chris, Tenn.	31	498	16.1	155	3
Crumpler, Carlester, Sea.	31	361	11.6	30	1
Bieniemy, Eric, Cin.	31	249	8.0	21	0
Blades, Brian, Sea.	30	319	10.6	27	2
Thomas, Thurman, Buf.	30	208	6.9	30	0
Moulds, Eric, Buf.	29	294	10.1	32	0
Abdul-Jabbar, Karim, Mia.	29	261	9.0	136	1
Morris, Bam, Balt.	29	176	6.1	15	0
Thomas, Lamar, Mia.	28	402	14.4	26	2
Parmalee, Bernie, Mia.	28	301	10.8	29	1
Smith, Antowain, Buf.	28	177	6.3	19	0
Jordan, Charles, Mia.	27	471	17.4	144	3
Glenn, Terry, N.E.	27	431	16.0	50	2
Dunn, David, Cin.	27	414	15.3	139	2
Dilger, Ken, Ind.	27	380	14.1	43	3
Baxter, Fred, NYJ	27	276	10.2	37	3
Dillon, Corey, Cin.	27	259	9.6	28	0
Murrell, Adrian, NYJ	27	106	3.9	23	0
Bailey, Aaron, Ind.	26	329	12.7	22	3
Riemersma, Jay, Buf.	26	208	8.0	22	2
Anderson, Richie, NYJ	26	150	5.8	19	1
Perriman, Brett, K.C.-Mia.	25	392	15.7	27	1
Stablein, Brian, Ind.	25	253	10.1	30	1

INTERCEPTIONS (3 or more)

Player, Team	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LG	TD
McMillian, Mark, K.C.	8	274	34.3	187	3
Williams, Darryl, Sea.	8	172	21.5	144	1
Smith, Otis, NYJ	6	158	26.3	151	3
Clay, Willie, N.E.	6	109	18.2	153	1
Robertson, Marcus, Tenn.	5	127	25.4	48	0
Lewis, Darryll, Tenn.	5	115	23.0	147	1
Figures, Deon, Jac.	5	48	9.6	32	0
Braxton, Tyrone, Den.	4	113	28.3	43	1
Woodford, Donnell, Pit.	4	91	22.8	34	0
Perry, Darren, Pit.	4	77	19.3	42	0
Gordon, Darrien, Den.	4	64	16.0	132	1
Woods, Jerome, K.C.	4	57	14.3	27	0
Moore, Stevon, Balt.	4	56	14.0	38	0
Sawyer, Corey, Cin.	4	44	11.0	37	0
Buckley, Terrell, Mia.	4	26	6.5	12	0
Crockett, Ray, Den.	4	18	4.5	10	0
Mickens, Ray, NYJ	4	2	0.5	2	0
Green, Victor, NYJ	3	89	29.7	39	0
Law, Ty, N.E.	3	70	23.3	40	0
Daniel, Eugene, Balt.	3	60	20.0	43	0
Ambrose, Ashley, Cin.	3	56	18.7	29	0
Langham, Antonio, Balt.	3	40	13.3	140	1
Hudson, Chris, Jac.	3	26	8.7	23	0
Hasty, James, K.C.	3	22	7.3	19	0
Lake, Carnell, Pit.	3	16	5.3	11	0
Milloy, Lawyer, N.E.	3	15	5.0	15	0

SACKS (5 or more)

Player, Team	No.
Smith, Bruce, Buf.	14.0
Sinclair, Michael, Sea.	12.0
Boulware, Peter, Balt.	11.5
Footman, Dan, Ind.	10.5
Williams, Dan, K.C.	10.5
Paup, Bryce, Buf.	9.5
Thomas, Derrick, K.C.	9.5
McCrary, Michael, Balt.	9.0
Slade, Chris, N.E.	9.0
Dixon, Gerald, Cin.	8.5

Simmons, Clyde, Jac.	8.5
Smith, Neil, Den.	8.5
Tanuvasa, Maa, Den.	8.5
Williams, Alfred, Den.	8.5
Lewis, Mo, NYJ	8.0
Adams, Sam, Sea.	7.0
Brackens, Tony, Jac.	7.0
Holmes, Kenny, Tenn.	7.0
Seau, Junior, S.D.	7.0
Thomas, Henry, N.E.	7.0
Walker, Gary, Tenn.	7.0
Brown, Chad, Sea.	6.5
Smeenge, Joel, Jac.	6.5

Smith, Anthony, Oak.	6.5
Hansen, Phil, Buf.	6.0
Jones, James, Balt.	6.0
Lake, Carnell, Pit.	6.0
Armstrong, Trace, Mia.	5.5
Bowens, Tim, Mia.	5.0
Ford, Henry, Tenn.	5.0
Gildon, Jason, Pit.	5.0
Kirkland, Levon, Pit.	5.0
Lageman, Jeff, Jac.	5.0
Rodgers, Derrick, Mia.	5.0
Taylor, Jason, Mia.	5.0
Wilkinson, Dan, Cin.	5.0

1997 NFC STATISTICAL LEADERS

PASSING

Player, Team	Att.	Comp.	Pct. Comp.	Avg. Yds.	Pct. Gain	TD	Pct. TD	Yds. Long	Rat. Int.	Int.	Sack	Lost	Pts.
Young, Steve, S.F.	356	241	67.7	3029	8.51	19	5.3	82	6	1.7	35	220	104.7
Chandler, Chris, Atl.	342	202	59.1	2692	7.87	20	5.8	56	7	2.0	39	261	95.1
Favre, Brett, G.B.	513	304	59.3	3867	7.54	35	6.8	74	16	3.1	25	176	92.6
Johnson, Brad, Min.	452	275	60.8	3036	6.72	20	4.4	56	12	2.7	26	164	84.5
Hoying, Bobby, Phi.	225	128	56.9	1573	6.99	11	4.9	172	6	2.7	28	183	83.8
Dilfer, Trent, T.B.	386	217	56.2	2555	6.62	21	5.4	159	11	2.8	32	196	82.8
Mitchell, Scott, Det.	509	293	57.6	3484	6.84	19	3.7	79	14	2.8	41	271	79.6
Aikman, Troy, Dal.	518	292	56.4	3283	6.34	19	3.7	164	12	2.3	33	269	78.0
Kramer, Erik, Chi.	477	275	57.7	3011	6.31	14	2.9	178	14	2.9	25	149	74.0
Detmer, Ty, Phi.	244	134	54.9	1567	6.42	7	2.9	57	6	2.5	19	94	73.9
Frerotte, Gus, Was.	402	204	50.7	2682	6.67	17	4.2	52	12	3.0	23	146	73.8
Plummer, Jake, Ariz.	296	157	53.0	2203	7.44	15	5.1	170	15	5.1	52	291	73.1
Banks, Tony, St.L.	487	252	51.7	3254	6.68	14	2.9	76	13	2.7	43	317	71.5
Kanell, Danny, NYG	294	156	53.1	1740	5.92	11	3.7	168	9	3.1	19	171	70.7
Graham, Kent, Ariz.	250	130	52.0	1408	5.63	4	1.6	47	5	2.0	16	115	65.9

PUNTING

Player, Team	Net Punts	Yards	Long	Avg.	Total Punts	TB	Bik.	Opp. Ret.	Ret. Yds.	In 20	Net Avg.
Royals, Mark, N.O.	88	4038	66	45.9	88	13	0	50	706	21	34.9
Turk, Matt, Was.	84	3788	62	45.1	85	11	1	33	237	32	39.2
Hentrich, Craig, G.B.	75	3378	65	45.0	75	21	0	32	255	26	36.0
Feagles, Jeff, Ariz.	91	4028	62	44.3	92	10	1	40	441	24	36.8
Berger, Mitch, Min.	73	3133	65	42.9	73	5	0	46	545	22	34.1
Horan, Mike, St.L.	53	2272	60	42.9	53	4	0	33	266	10	36.3
Sauerbrun, Todd, Chi.	95	4059	67	42.7	95	11	0	52	727	26	32.8
Jett, John, Det.	84	3576	60	42.6	86	4	2	51	434	24	35.6
Walter, Ken, Car.	85	3604	62	42.4	85	4	0	38	428	29	36.4
Hutton, Tom, Phi.	87	3660	61	42.1	88	5	1	48	515	19	34.6
Landeta, Sean, T.B.	54	2274	74	42.1	55	6	1	28	278	15	34.1
Gowin, Toby, Dal.	86	3592	72	41.8	86	9	0	40	365	26	35.4
Brice, Will, St.L.	41	1713	61	41.8	42	4	1	27	352	6	30.5
Maynard, Brad, NYG	111	4531	57	40.8	112	14	1	40	378	33	34.6
Thompson, Tommy, S.F.	78	3182	55	40.8	79	7	1	41	307	22	34.6
Strzyzinski, Dan, Atl.	89	3498	57	39.3	89	9	0	21	55	20	36.7

SCORING

Kickers

Player, Team	XP Made	XP Att.	FG Made	Misc. Att.	Tot. Pts.
Cunningham, Richie, Dal.	24	24	34	37	126
Anderson, Gary, S.F.	38	38	29	36	125
Longwell, Ryan, G.B.	48	48	24	30	120
Hanson, Jason, Det.	39	40	26	29	117
Wilkins, Jeff, St.L.	32	32	25	37	107
Andersen, Morten, Atl.	35	35	23	27	104
Bonioli, Chris, Phi.	33	33	22	31	99
Daluiso, Brad, NYG	27	29	22	32	93
Brien, Doug, N.O.	22	22	23	27	91
Kasay, John, Car.	25	25	22	26	91
Jaeger, Jeff, Chi.	20	20	21	26	83
Blanton, Scott, Was.	34	34	16	24	82
Husted, Michael, T.B.	32	35	13	17	71
Murray, Eddie, Min.	23	24	12	17	59
Nedney, Joe, Ariz.	19	19	11	17	52
Butler, Kevin, Ariz.	9	10	8	12	33
Jacke, Chris, Was.	5	5	0	0	5
Gowin, Toby, Dal.	0	0	0	1	0

Non-kickers (20 or more points)

Player, Team	Total TD	Rush TD	Rec. TD	Misc. TD	2pt.	Tot. Pts.
Carter, Cris, Min.	13	0	13	0	3	84
Sanders, Barry, Det.	14	11	3	0	0	84
Levens, Dorsey, G.B.	12	7	5	0	1	74
Freeman, Antonio, G.B.	12	0	12	0	0	72
Alstott, Mike, T.B.	10	7	3	0	0	60
Anderson, Jamal, Atl.	10	7	3	0	0	60
Harris, Raymont, Chi.	10	10	0	0	0	60
Emanuel, Bert, Atl.	9	0	9	0	0	54
Irvin, Michael, Dal.	9	0	9	0	0	54
Kirby, Terry, S.F.	8	6	1	1	2	52
Moore, Herman, Det.	8	0	8	0	1	50
Moore, Rob, Ariz.	8	0	8	0	1	50
Calloway, Chris, NYG	8	0	8	0	0	48
Owens, Terrell, S.F.	8	0	8	0	0	48
Phillips, Lawrence, St.L.	8	0	0	0	0	48
Proehl, Ricky, Chi.	7	0	7	0	1	44
Brooks, Robert, G.B.	7	0	7	0	0	42
Dunn, Warrick, T.B.	7	4	3	0	0	42

RUSHING (100 or more yards)

Player, Team	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
Sanders, Barry, Det.	335	2053	6.1	182	11
Levens, Dorsey, G.B.	329	1435	4.4	152	7
Smith, Robert, Min.	232	1266	5.5	178	6
Watters, Ricky, Phi.	285	1110	3.9	28	7
Smith, Emmitt, Dal.	261	1074	4.1	44	4
Harris, Raymont, Chi.	275	1033	3.8	168	10
Hearst, Garrison, S.F.	234	1019	4.4	51	4
Anderson, Jamal, Atl.	290	1002	3.5	39	7
Dunn, Warrick, T.B.	224	978	4.4	76	4
Lane, Fred, Car.	182	809	4.4	50	7
Allen, Terry, Was.	210	724	3.4	34	4
Way, Charles, NYG	151	698	4.6	42	4
Alstott, Mike, T.B.	176	665	3.8	147	7
Wheatley, Tyrone, NYG	152	583	3.8	38	4
Davis, Stephen, Was.	141	567	4.0	18	3
Zellars, Ray, N.O.	156	552	3.5	27	4
Garner, Charlie, Phi.	116	547	4.7	26	3
Barber, Tiki, NYG	136	511	3.8	42	3

Williams, Sherman, Dal.	121	468	3.9	18	2
Bates, Mario, N.O.	119	440	3.7	t74	4
McElroy, Leeland, Ariz.	135	424	3.1	18	2
Kirby, Terry, S.F.	125	418	3.3	38	6
Moore, Jerald, St.L.	104	380	3.7	26	3
Johnson, Anthony, Car.	97	358	3.7	20	0
Hanspard, Byron, Atl.	53	335	6.3	77	0
Autry, Darnell, Chi.	112	319	2.8	17	1
Biakabutuka, Tim, Car.	75	299	4.0	t26	2
Moore, Ronald, St.L.-Ari.	81	278	3.4	t27	1
Centers, Larry, Ariz.	101	276	2.7	14	1
Davis, Troy, N.O.	75	271	3.6	20	0
Hoard, Leroy, Min.	80	235	2.9	20	4
Floyd, William, S.F.	78	231	3.0	22	3
Plummer, Jake, Ariz.	39	216	5.5	31	2
Young, Steve, S.F.	50	199	4.0	13	3
Favre, Brett, G.B.	58	187	3.2	16	1
Banks, Tony, St.L.	47	186	4.0	23	1
Rivers, Ron, Det.	29	166	5.7	31	1
Chandler, Chris, Atl.	43	158	3.7	19	0
Evans, Charles, Min.	43	157	3.7	13	2
Greene, Scott, Car.	45	157	3.5	t10	1
Hayden, Aaron, G.B.	32	148	4.6	21	1
Johnson, Brad, Min.	35	139	4.0	28	0
Cunningham, Randall, Min.	19	127	6.7	28	0
Vardell, Tommy, Det.	32	122	3.8	41	6
Henderson, William, G.B.	31	113	3.6	15	0
Salaam, Rashaan, Chi.	31	112	3.6	17	0
Mitchell, Brian, Was.	23	107	4.7	26	1
Lee, Amp, St.L.	28	104	3.7	14	0
Bowie, Larry, Was.	28	100	3.6	18	2

PUNT RETURNS

Player, Team	No.	FC	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
Palmer, David, Min.	34	19	444	13.1	57	0
Williams, Karl, T.B.	46	12	597	13.0	63	1
Sanders, Deion, Dal.	33	12	407	12.3	t83	1
Williams, Kevin, Ariz.	40	15	462	11.6	50	0
Mitchell, Brian, Was.	38	23	442	11.6	t63	1
Uwaezuoke, Iheanyi, S.F.	34	14	373	11.0	36	0
Guliford, Eric, N.O.	47	26	498	10.6	32	0
Schroeder, Bill, G.B.	33	8	342	10.4	46	0
Toomer, Amani, NYG	47	19	455	9.7	t53	1
Milburn, Glyn, Det.	47	26	433	9.2	40	0
Kinchen, Todd, Atl.	52	13	446	8.6	38	0
Kennison, Eddie, St.L.	34	20	247	7.3	43	0
Poole, Tyrone, Car.	26	18	191	7.3	40	0
Hughes, Tyrone, Chi.	36	7	258	7.2	19	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Player, Team	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
Bates, Michael, Car.	47	1281	27.3	56	0
Guliford, Eric, N.O.	43	1128	26.2	t102	1
Williams, Kevin, Ariz.	59	1458	24.7	63	0
Hanspard, Byron, Atl.	40	987	24.7	t99	2
Staley, Duce, Phi.	47	1139	24.2	57	0
Milburn, Glyn, Det.	55	1315	23.9	69	0
Anthony, Reidel, T.B.	25	592	23.7	51	0
Hughes, Tyrone, Chi.	43	1008	23.4	58	0
Schroeder, Bill, G.B.	24	562	23.4	40	0
Walker, Herschel, Dal.	50	1167	23.3	49	0
Mitchell, Brian, Was.	47	1094	23.3	t97	1
Thompson, David, St.L.	49	1110	22.7	56	0
Palmer, David, Min.	32	711	22.2	62	0
Levy, Chuck, S.F.	36	793	22.0	59	0
Pegram, Eric, NYG	22	382	17.4	50	0

RECEIVING (25 or more receptions)

Player, Team	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
Moore, Herman, Det.	104	1293	12.4	79	8
Moore, Rob, Ariz.	97	1584	16.3	t47	8
Carter, Cris, Min.	89	1069	12.0	43	13
Fryar, Irving, Phi.	86	1316	15.3	t72	6
Freeman, Antonio, G.B.	81	1243	15.3	t58	12
Morton, Johnnie, Det.	80	1057	13.2	t73	6
Irvin, Michael, Dal.	75	1180	15.7	55	9

Sanders, Frank, Ariz.	75	1017	13.6	t70	4
Reed, Jake, Min.	68	1138	16.7	56	6
Emanuel, Bert, Atl.	65	991	15.2	56	9
Mathis, Terance, Atl.	62	802	12.9	49	6
Lee, Amp, St.L.	61	825	13.5	62	3
Brooks, Robert, G.B.	60	1010	16.8	48	7
Owens, Terrell, S.F.	60	936	15.6	t56	8
Calloway, Chris, NYG	58	849	14.6	t68	8
Proehl, Ricky, Chi.	58	753	13.0	t78	7
Walls, Wesley, Car.	58	746	12.9	52	6
Stokes, J.J., S.F.	58	733	12.6	36	4
Bruce, Isaac, St.L.	56	815	14.6	59	5
Hill, Randal, N.O.	55	761	13.8	t89	2
Centers, Larry, Ariz.	54	409	7.6	29	1
Levens, Dorsey, G.B.	53	370	7.0	56	5
Asher, Jamie, Was.	49	474	9.7	24	1
Hastings, Andre, N.O.	48	722	15.0	39	5
Turner, Kevin, Phi.	48	443	9.2	36	3
Watters, Ricky, Phi.	48	440	9.2	37	0
Penn, Chris, Chi.	47	576	12.3	33	3
Bjornson, Eric, Dal.	47	442	9.4	32	0
Miller, Anthony, Dal.	46	645	14.0	54	4
Wetnight, Ryan, Chi.	46	464	10.1	34	1
Engram, Bobby, Chi.	45	399	8.9	23	2
Caruth, Rae, Car.	44	545	12.4	52	4
Timpson, Michael, Phi.	42	484	11.5	26	2
Henderson, William, G.B.	41	367	9.0	25	1
Greene, Scott, Car.	40	277	6.9	25	1
Smith, Emmitt, Dal.	40	234	5.9	24	0
Dunn, Warrick, T.B.	39	462	11.8	t59	3
Chmura, Mark, G.B.	38	417	11.0	t32	6
Conwell, Ernie, St.L.	38	404	10.6	t46	4
Floyd, William, S.F.	37	321	8.7	t44	1
Way, Charles, NYG	37	304	8.2	62	1
Smith, Robert, Min.	37	197	5.3	20	1
Mitchell, Brian, Was.	36	438	12.2	69	1
Ismail, Raghib, Car.	36	419	11.6	t59	2
Anthony, Reidel, T.B.	35	448	12.8	t38	4
Westbrook, Michael, Was.	34	559	16.4	t40	3
Bowie, Larry, Was.	34	388	11.4	t39	2
Barber, Tiki, NYG	34	299	8.8	29	1
Williams, Karl, T.B.	33	486	14.7	55	4
Carrier, Mark, Car.	33	436	13.2	36	2
Copeland, Horace, T.B.	33	431	13.1	49	1
Sanders, Barry, Det.	33	305	9.2	t66	3
Small, Torrance, St.L.	32	488	15.3	46	1
Ellard, Henry, Was.	32	485	15.2	27	4
Glover, Andrew, Min.	32	378	11.8	43	3
Zellers, Ray, N.O.	31	263	8.5	38	0
Conway, Curtis, Chi.	30	476	15.9	t55	1
Williams, Stepfret, Dal.	30	308	10.3	20	1
Shepherd, Leslie, Was.	29	562	19.4	48	5
Solomon, Freddie, Phi.	29	455	15.7	56	3
Jones, Brent, S.F.	29	383	13.2	33	2
Green, Harold, Atl.	29	360	12.4	47	0
Anderson, Jamal, Atl.	29	284	9.8	t47	3
Sloan, David, Det.	29	264	9.1	25	0
Harris, Raymont, Chi.	28	115	4.1	16	0
Guliford, Eric, N.O.	27	362	13.4	47	1
Muhammad, Muhsin, Car.	27	317	11.7	38	0
Palmer, David, Min.	26	193	7.4	23	1
Kennison, Eddie, St.L.	25	404	16.2	76	0

INTERCEPTIONS (3 or more)

Player, Team	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Long	TD
McNeil, Ryan, St.L.	9	127	14.1	t75	1
Lyle, Keith, St.L.	8	102	12.8	39	0
Hanks, Merton, S.F.	6	103	17.2	t55	1
Williams, Aeneas, Ariz.	6	95	15.8	t42	2
Sehorn, Jason, NYG	6	74	12.3	41	1
Wooten, Tito, NYG	5	146	29.2	t61	1
Carrier, Mark, Det.	5	94	18.8	66	0
Knight, Sammy, N.O.	5	75	15.0	39	0
Sparks, Phillippi, NYG	5	72	14.4	68	0

Buchanan, Ray, Atl.	5	49	9.8	31	0
Harris, Walt, Chi.	5	30	6.0	12	0
Davis, Eric, Car.	5	25	5.0	17	0
Abraham, Donnie, T.B.	5	16	3.2	16	0
Drakeford, Tyrone, S.F.	5	15	3.0	15	0
Butler, LeRoy, G.B.	5	4	0.8	2	0
Prior, Mike, G.B.	4	72	18.0	49	0
Washington, Dewayne, Min.	4	71	17.8	27	0
Dishman, Cris, Was.	4	47	11.8	t29	1
Ellsworth, Percy, NYG	4	40	10.0	25	0
Richard, Stanley, Was.	4	28	7.0	23	0
Lyght, Todd, St.L.	4	25	6.3	13	0
Bradford, Ronnie, Atl.	4	9	2.3	9	0
Woodson, Rod, S.F.	3	81	27.0	41	0
Dawkins, Brian, Phi.	3	76	25.3	t64	1
Walker, Darnell, S.F.	3	49	16.3	28	0
Pounds, Darryl, Was.	3	42	14.0	t22	1
McKinnon, Ronald, Ariz.	3	40	13.3	17	0
McDonald, Tim, S.F.	3	34	11.3	17	0
Evans, Doug, G.B.	3	33	11.0	27	0
Newman, Anthony, N.O.	3	19	6.3	17	0
Booker, Michael, Atl.	3	16	5.3	10	0
Vincent, Troy, Phi.	3	14	4.7	14	0
Carter, Tom, Chi.	3	12	4.0	12	0

SACKS (5 or more)

Player, Team	No.
Randle, John, Min.	15.5
Stubblefield, Dana, S.F.	15.0
Strahan, Michael, NYG	14.0
Porcher, Robert, Det.	12.5
Doleman, Chris, S.F.	12.0
Smith, Chuck, Atl.	12.0
White, Reggie, G.B.	11.0
Greene, Kevin, S.F.	10.5
Hall, Travis, Atl.	10.5
Martin, Wayne, N.O.	10.5
Sapp, Warren, T.B.	10.5
Ahanotu, Chidi, T.B.	10.0
Harris, Robert, NYG	10.0
O'Neal, Leslie, St.L.	10.0
Harvey, Ken, Was.	9.5
Archambeau, Lester, Atl.	8.5
Barrow, Micheal, Car.	8.5
Culpepper, Brad, T.B.	8.5
Elliss, Luther, Det.	8.5
Johnson, Joe, N.O.	8.5
Fields, Mark, N.O.	8.0
Hall, Rhett, Phi.	8.0
Hamilton, Keith, NYG	8.0
Owens, Dan, Atl.	8.0
Carter, Kevin, St.L.	7.5
Scroggins, Tracy, Det.	7.5
Swann, Eric, Ariz.	7.5
Upshaw, Regan, T.B.	7.5
Bennett, Cornelius, Atl.	7.0
Clemons, Duane, Min.	7.0
Glover, La'Roi, N.O.	6.5
Carver, Shante, Dal.	6.0
Flanigan, Jim, Chi.	6.0
Minter, Barry, Chi.	6.0
Smith, Mark, Ariz.	6.0
Barker, Roy, S.F.	5.5
Dotson, Santana, G.B.	5.5
Miller, Jamir, Ariz.	5.5
Miller, Les, Car.	5.5
Wilkins, Gabe, G.B.	5.5
Cox, Bryan, Chi.	5.0
Rice, Simeon, Ariz.	5.0
Royal, Andre, Car.	5.0
Rudd, Dwayne, Min.	5.0
Smith, Brady, N.O.	5.0
Thomas, William, Phi.	5.0
Tolbert, Tony, Dal.	5.0

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CLOSERCLOSER

BY JOE HOPPEL

TV and the NFL: A match made in overtime heaven 40 years ago

What it was, Andy Griffith said in a hilarious monologue, was football, a game played on a "pretty little green cow pasture, with five or six convicts a-runnin' up and down and a-blowin' whistles."

If Griffith's recounting of a hillbilly's impressions of his first football game proved a national hit in the 1950s—and it did—the sport in general and the NFL in particular were not yet a hit among the masses. Not compared with baseball, anyway. There weren't a lot of kids running around in Chicago Cardinals jerseys.

But on December 28, 1958, all that began to change when a nationwide TV audience tuned in to a game played on a massive expanse of green in New York, with some of the most gifted football players in history a-runnin' up and down the Yankee Stadium turf.

What it was, was the most meaningful pro football game ever played: the Baltimore Colts vs. the New York Giants for the NFL championship. Meaningful as in the NFL's emerging grip on the U.S. sports psyche. And meaningful as in thousands, and then millions, and then billions, of dollars in TV revenue.

Even if the game had not evolved into a made-for-TV thriller, the cast of marquee players alone attracted unusual interest nationwide. The Colts, who won the Western Conference title with a 9-3 record, featured Johnny Unitas, Raymond Berry, Gino Marchetti, Art Donovan, Big Daddy Lipscomb and Lenny Moore. The 9-3 Giants, who wound up in a first-place tie with Cleveland in the East, then beat the Browns for the third time that season in a playoff game, boasted Charley Conerly, Frank Gifford, Sam Huff, Andy Robustelli, Kyle Rote and Roosevelt Brown. And with all the superstars making one big play after another, the game *did* evolve into taut drama.

"There was a feeling even in the first half that this was special," says Colts broadcaster Chuck Thompson, who was the lead announcer for NBC's telecast of the game. "Both teams moved the ball, and both played great defense."

The Colts moved the ball a little better, however, and played superior defense on the way to building a 14-3 halftime lead. The Yankee Stadium throng of 64,185 and a national-TV audience of about 11 million were not lulled into inattentiveness, though. This was a Giants team whose offense had myriad deadly weapons and whose defense had limited Jim Brown to eight yards rushing in the Eastern Conference playoff. Don't head for the subway station or change that dial just yet.

And sure enough, the Giants rebounded. After scoring a third-quarter touchdown, they seized the lead, 17-14, early in the fourth period on a Conerly-to-Gifford touchdown pass. But with a little more than two minutes left, Gifford was stopped inches short of a first down on a third-and-4 running play from the Giants' 40. Baltimore would get the ball back.

As fans in the stadium and those in living rooms inched to the edge of their seats, the Colts took over at their 14. And that man, Unitas, went to work.

"Unitas' hookups with Raymond Berry are among the classic plays in pro football history," says Thompson, alluding to three consecutive passes that netted 62 yards and set up a game-tying field goal by Steve Myhra with seven seconds remaining. As the final seconds ticked off and an overtime period neared, the drama heightened—and it wasn't confined to the field, either.

"In a pregame meeting with (commissioner) Bert Bell, it was determined I'd call the first half on NBC and my teammate, Chris Schenkel, would call the second half," Thompson says, "but when the overtime came, we didn't know who would handle it. Luckily, the NBC people



Ameche bolted through a huge hole for the touchdown that gave the Colts the historic victory and set the NFL on its path to TV riches.

in the booth pointed at me."

Luck intervened again in the overtime. After the Giants had a three-and-out series to begin the extra session, the Colts drove downfield and were perched deep in New York territory when—horrors!—NBC lost its video feed. Amid the tumult of the finish, some fans had surged from the stands to the sideline and a power cable apparently was knocked loose.

"We weren't sure if it was a plug or what," Thompson says. "It was wild and unsettling in the booth. Some fan ran onto the field—I've joked over the years that it must have been some highly paid NBC executive, but I still have no idea who it was—and an official had to take the guy off the field. I don't think we could have gotten the game stopped otherwise ... but that incident gave us the time to rectify the picture problem."

A short time later, a captivated television audience watched Alan Ameche bull into the end zone from the 1, making the Colts 23-17 winners and NFL champions.

Unafraid to commit a little pro football heresy nearly 40 years after the rumble in the Bronx, Thompson says he wouldn't necessarily call the game the greatest ever played. But he was certain "it did more than anything else to make the NFL a very viable product for TV. And it had more to do than anything else with the feelings TV people developed for pro football."

"Sure, the New York factor (the nation's media center with all the attendant hype) was important," he says. "So was the timing. This kind of game (overtime) had never happened before."

As the 1998 season approaches, the NFL's bond with television has grown to epic proportions—133.4 million viewers watched Super Bowl 32 in January, and the league and the networks agreed to a \$17.6 billion contract over the next eight years.

All of which reminds us that, yes, Andy Griffith had the eye to describe football in a particularly delightful manner four-plus decades ago. But it took the eye of the TV camera to capture the sport in all its riveting glory, which it did in landmark fashion on a December day in 1958.

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Joe Hoppel is a senior editor at THE SPORTING NEWS.

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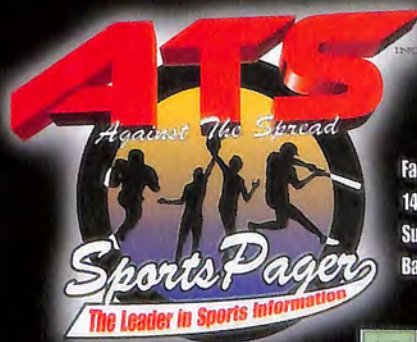


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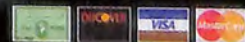
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